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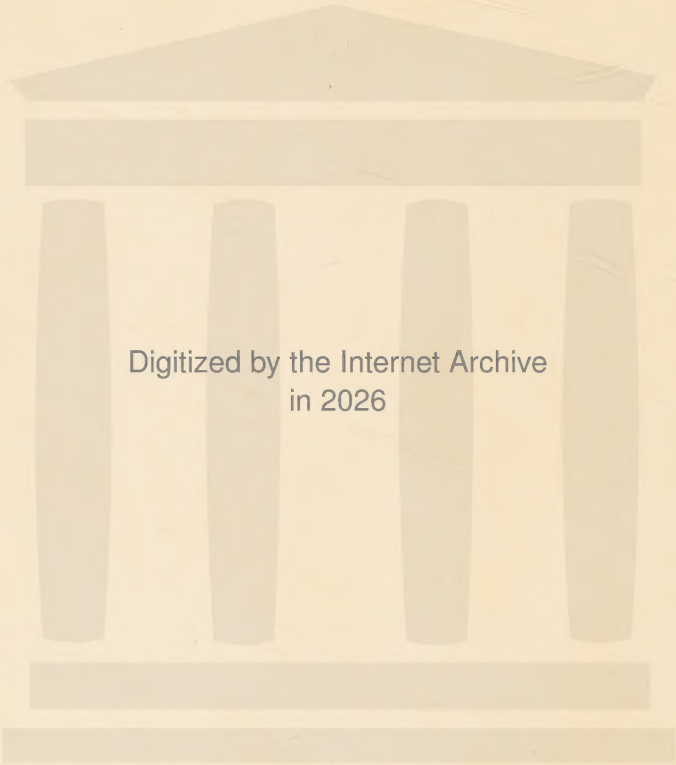
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WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL

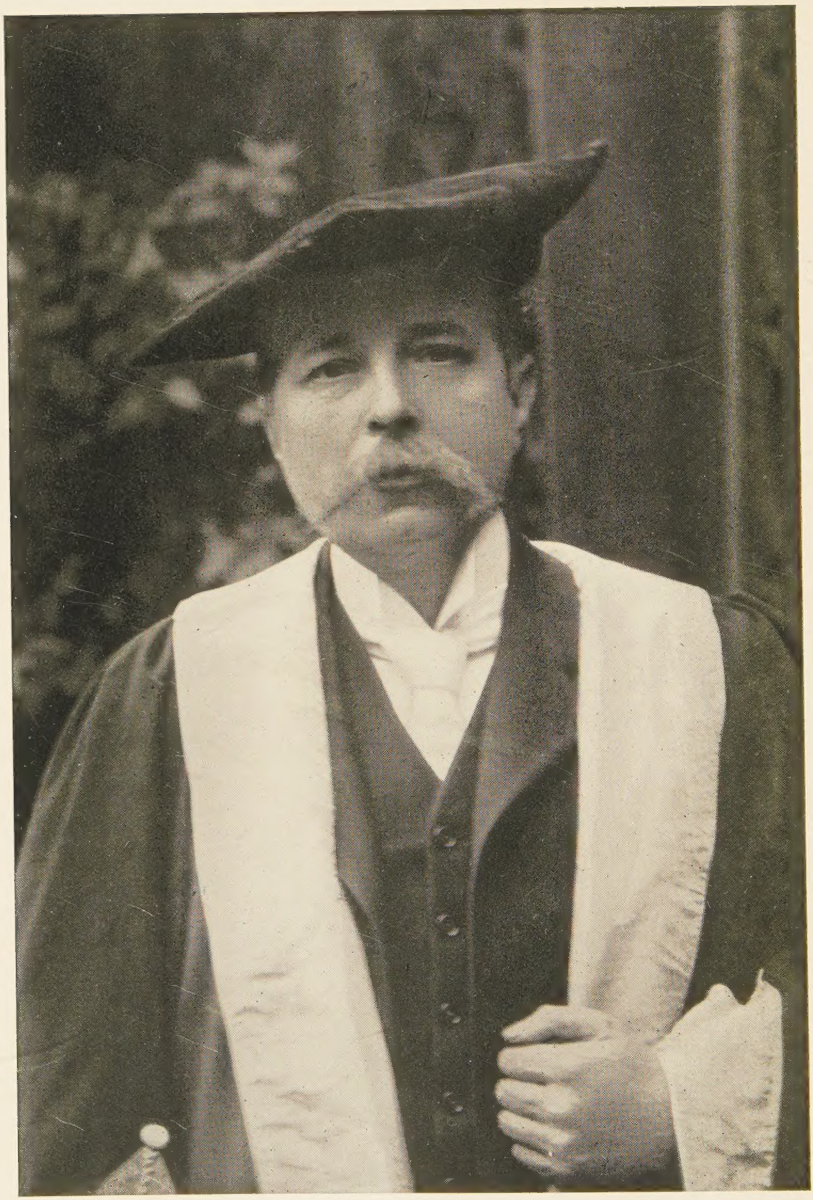

*Photo. T. J. Brookes*

WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL, LL.D. ABERDEEN

# WILLIAM ROBERTSON NICOLL

## LIFE AND LETTERS

BY

T. H. DARLOW

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

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*First Impression* . . *September 1925*
*Second Impression* . . *September 1925*

Made and Printed in Great Britain
T. and A. Constable Ltd., Printers, Edinburgh

# PREFACE

When Lady Robertson Nicoll, her husband's other executors and his children entrusted me with the task of preparing this book, they placed at my disposal the great mass of his letters, papers, and other documents, besides private letters in their own possession. They have also given me most willing help throughout the work, and their corrections and suggestions have been carried into the proof sheets by the aid of Mrs. Elystan Miles.

Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams has allowed me full liberty to consult his files of personal as well as business correspondence with Nicoll. Apart from his unfailing counsel and encouragement, the biography could hardly have been written.

My warm gratitude is due also to Sir J. M. Barrie, who has read the proofs and sanctioned the insertion of letters written by himself.

To Lord Riddell I am deeply indebted not only for a number of letters, but for much valuable personal information and sagacious revision.

The Rev. W. M'Robbie has generously lent me many intimate and revealing letters, and has also furnished recollections of his old friend.

I have to thank Mr. Clement K. Shorter for a number of letters, as well as for friendly criticisms and suggestions.

To the Rev. Innes Logan, Nicoll's nephew, my sincere thanks are due for the facts and family details which he has supplied.

Miss Jane T. Stoddart and Mrs. Wyatt-Smith have given me most kind and valuable help from their own intimate knowledge, and also in correcting the proof sheets.

To Mr. Horace Morgan and to Mr. W. Grinton Berry, I am much indebted for their valuable suggestions and for reading the proofs.

For a number of important personal letters I am deeply obliged to each of the following :—the Rev. Professor H. R. Mackintosh, of Edinburgh ; the Rev. Professor James Moffatt, of Glasgow ; Professor A. S. Peake, of Manchester ; the Rev. Dr. J. D. Jones, of Bournemouth ; Dr. D. Hay Fleming, of Edinburgh ; Mr. Robert Denney, of Glasgow ; Mr. J. Macniven, of Edinburgh ; Mr. James Drummond, of Stirling ; Mr. Arthur E. Waite ; Mr. Cecil A. Stoughton ; and Canon Anthony C. Deane.

To the following ladies I also owe sincere acknowledgments :—the Duchess of Hamilton (for letters from the late Lord Fisher) ; Lady Frances Balfour ; Lady Lucy (for letters to the late Sir H. W. Lucy) ; Lady Adam Smith ; Lady Reid ; Mrs. Watts-Dunton (for letters to and from the late Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton) ; Mrs. Burnett Smith ; Mrs. Hastings ; Mrs. Forsyth ; Mrs. Milne, Miss Mary Symon, and Miss Meta Grant, of Dufftown.

For personal reminiscences, or letters, or both, I most gratefully record my obligations to the Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd George ; the Rt. Hon. Reginald M'Kenna ; Dr. Henry Stephen, of Calcutta University ; the Rev. Charles Green, of Eastbourne ; the Rev. Dr. W. S. Bruce, of Banff ; Mrs. Marie Connor

Leighton ; Mr. Joseph Hocking ; Mr. David Williamson ; the Rev. George Henderson, of Monzie, Crieff ; the Rev. Professor George Jackson, of Didsbury ; the Rev. Professor James Stalker ; Sir John Adams ; Professor Leslie Elmslie ; the Rev. Hubert L. Simpson ; Sir A. T. Quiller-Couch ; Sir Robert Donald ; Sir Hedley Le Bas ; Sir Arthur Spurgeon ; Mr. Coulson Kernahan ; Mr. Robert Cochrane, of Edinburgh ; the Rev. W. S. Crockett ; Dr. J. M. Bulloch, formerly editor of the *Graphic* ; Mr. A. St. John Adcock, editor of the *Bookman* ; Mr. David Pae, editor of the *People's Friend*, Dundee ; Mr. T. D. Crichton Smith, of Kelso ; Mr. J. Crowlesmith ; Mr. J. Grigor ; and Mr. Edward H. Dodd, of New York.

I must also thank for their valued assistance Dr. A. Shewan, of St. Andrews ; Dr. W. Keith Leask, of Aberdeen ; Mr. J. Hugh Edwards, M.P. ; Mr. T. J. Wise ; Mr. A. J. Mundella ; Mr. T. H. Stockwell, of Croydon ; Mr. J. Milne, of the *Graphic* ; Mr. D. Matz ; Mr. Percy Hodder-Williams ; Mr. J. H. Apted ; Mr. A. Mackintosh ; the Rev. E. F. Russell ; Pastor J. K. Popham, of Brighton ; the Rev. A. J. Anderson, of Rhynie ; the Rev. Neil Conley, of Dufftown ; the Rev. Dr. D. Burford Hooke ; and Mr. T. S. Wilmhurst, of Redhill.

For six months I was fortunate enough to obtain the regular help of Miss Evelyn Smith, who had acted as Nicoll's private secretary from October 1914 down to the end of his life. By her personal knowledge, her skill and accuracy, combined with her sympathetic insight and interest, she rendered invaluable service in the heavy preliminary work which the biography entailed.

My friend Mr. David Williamson and his accomplished daughter have in sheer goodness of heart undertaken the labour of compiling the index.

Thus generously aided, the book has been brought to completion. For the result, no one is responsible except the author. To this biography of Nicoll I may apply his own sentences [1] in regard to another biography which he wrote himself:—'All attempts to describe or report him must be sadly inadequate. But for the friendship with which he honoured me and for the love I bore him, I have done my best. . . . I have thought it my duty to set him forth as he was, and to give his own views as nearly as possible in his own words.'

It was my privilege to enjoy my friend's intimacy for nearly half a lifetime. As a rule we met every week, and talked for hours without reserve. In these pages I have tried to set down some imperfect impressions of perhaps the most remarkable person I ever knew.

T. H. DARLOW.

Northwood, Middlesex,
*Whitsuntide*, 1925.

[1] From the preface to 'Ian Maclaren,' by W. Robertson Nicoll.

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# BIOGRAPHICAL TABLE

*The ideal biography should begin with a very clear chronological table, showing at a glance how the life was divided. For want of this we misconceive—we do not see how events are spread about or crowded together in a space of years.* W. ROBERTSON NICOLL: 'Letters on Life,' p. 227.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1851. | Oct. 10. | Born at Lumsden, Aberdeenshire. |
| 1859. | Oct. 30. | Death of his mother. |
| 1866. | April. | Entered Aberdeen Grammar School. |
| | Nov. | Entered Aberdeen University. |
| 1870. | April. | Graduated M.A. |
| | Nov. | Entered the Free Church Divinity Hall, Aberdeen. |
| 1872. | | Licensed to preach. |
| 1874. | April. | Completed Course at Divinity Hall. |
| | Nov. 18. | Ordained minister of the Free Church, Dufftown. |
| 1877. | Sept. 6. | Inducted minister of the Free Church, Kelso. |
| 1878. | Aug. 21. | Married Miss Isa Dunlop. |
| 1884. | Summer. | Appointed editor of *Expositor*. |
| 1885. | Autumn. | Serious illness. |
| 1886. | Jan. | Resigned charge at Kelso. |
| | Spring. | At Dawlish and in the Engadine. |
| | June. | Settled at Norwood. |
| | Nov. 5. | *British Weekly* appeared. |
| 1889. | Feb. | Removed to Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead. |
| 1890. | March. | LL.D. Aberdeen. |
| 1891. | Oct. 1. | *Bookman* appeared. |
| 1893. | Oct. 1. | *Woman at Home* appeared. |
| 1894. | June 2. | Death of his wife. |
| 1896. | Sept.-Nov. | Visited U.S.A. with J. M. Barrie. |
| 1897. | May 1. | Married Miss Catherine Pollard. |
| 1902. | | Education Bill controversy began. |
| 1907. | | 'New Theology' controversy began. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1909. | Nov. | Knighthood. |
| 1916. | Nov. | ' Thirty years of the *British Weekly*.' |
| 1921. | July 19. | Investiture as Companion of Honour. |
| 1922. | May. | Hon. LL.D. conferred by St. Andrews. |
| 1923. | May 4. | Died at Hampstead. |
| | May 8. | Buried in Highgate Cemetery. |

# CHAPTER I

## 'THE HILLS WHERE HIS LIFE ROSE'

To produce a life-like and coherent portrait of William Robertson Nicoll is no easy task. His brilliant personality seemed perplexing by reason of its strange combination of gifts. People were baffled by a man in whom such contrasted faculties could unite. Here was a powerful editor, continually hampered by frail health ; a stalwart politician, steeped in literature ; a deeply-read theologian, who outstripped his rivals in business ; a writer of tireless industry, whose talk overflowed with humour ; a mystic, who had mastered the whole craft of journalism ; a catholic-minded humanist, who kept his fervid Puritan faith. Even to the friends who knew him best his character appeared complex, and at times they felt puzzled to reconcile all his multifarious interests, his intense activities, his ardent convictions. Outsiders were often tempted to imagine him ' like Cerberus, three gentlemen at once.'

We discover clues to the problem when we explore the ground out of which it grew. To begin with, Nicoll was a Scot—first and last and all the time. It is one of the glories of Scotland that she has held so tenaciously to her own history and traditions, and to a national form of religion which involves ecclesiastical sub-divisions that no Englishman can properly understand. Scottish dialect, again, is as distinctive as Scottish thrift, and Nicoll himself never lost his native accent and intonation. In his company you felt at once the curious difference between North Britons and South. He had Caledonian prejudices and sympathies in his marrow, and cherished a peculiar tenderness for his own countrymen. For him there

were no hills like the Grampians and there was no university like Aberdeen.

His father and mother both came of old Highland blood. Yet we must qualify their son by the words which Lord Morley once wrote of Mr. Gladstone : he was ' a Highlander in the custody of a Lowlander.' In his being the idealism and poetry and passion of the northern temperament mingled with a strain of those dour, canny, commercial instincts which belong to so many southern Scotsmen. Again, Nicoll was a son of the soil, and in Aberdeenshire the soil is rocky and stubborn as the skies are austere. Then he was a son of the manse in a remote village, and grew up to minister in the Free Kirk, and died in its communion. Last, but not least, he had been surrounded with books from his cradle ; he drew breath in a home bare of all luxuries beyond the many thousands of volumes which his father half-starved himself to collect. Variegated threads like these blended in the warp and woof of Nicoll's nature, and before we can understand him we must take them separately and collectively into account.

By ancestry he was a pure Celt. He would recall proudly that his kinsmen on both sides had fought at Culloden for Prince Charlie. His mother's family, the Robertsons, came of the Robertsons of Struan, a Highland house which counts among its members the famous preacher, F. W. Robertson of Brighton. His mother's uncle, the Rev. William Robertson, claimed, though unsuccessfully, to be head of the Struan clan. The Nicolls themselves were a branch of the Macleods, settled originally in the Braes of Cromar. Early last century one of them held a little farm near Lumsden, in West Aberdeenshire, and in that village his son Harry was born in 1812. By dint of Spartan endurance Harry Nicoll contrived to graduate at Aberdeen, and was appointed in 1834 schoolmaster of his native parish of Auchindoir, of which Lumsden is the centre.[1]

[1] The family had produced one distinguished scholar, Alexander Nicoll, D.C.L., F.R.S., a cousin of Harry Nicoll, who was born in 1793 at Monymusk, an Aberdeenshire village. His father was a wheelwright

The schoolmaster had set his heart on the ministry. A born lover of books, he plunged deep into theological study and obtained licence to preach. During those early years when the Tractarian movement was agitating the Church of England a kindred controversy rose in the Scottish Kirk, and finally resulted in the Disruption of 1843—one of the heroic episodes in ecclesiastical history. At such a crisis 'the pecuniary poverty and spiritual opulence of Scotland were seen at their best.' The Rev. Harry Nicoll took the Free Church side, and so forfeited his position as schoolmaster. He became instead the first Free Church minister of Auchindoir, and continued in that office till his death in 1891. He preached to about a hundred people in a plain, barn-like building with whitewashed walls and bare deal pews. 'He knew every house, every individual —it might almost be said every tree, every flower, every stone of the "primitive, russet, remote country" in which he lived and died.' [1]

Lumsden itself is a bleak, lonely little village, which in those days sheltered five or six hundred people. The scent of peat-smoke clings round its cottages, and the nearest railway station is eight miles away. The place lies high among rolling hills, wild and beautiful, whose streams drain northwards into the river Bogie, or southwards into the river Don which coils and curves to reach the sea above Old Aberdeen. Throughout that district of Strathbogie and Strathdon the

and belonged to the Scottish Episcopal communion. From Aberdeen Grammar School he entered the University when only fourteen, but obtained a Snell Exhibition at Balliol and proceeded to Oxford. An expert linguist, he specialized in Semitic languages, and became Sub-Librarian of the Bodleian, where he devoted himself to cataloguing Oriental manuscripts. In 1822 Lord Liverpool appointed him Regius Professor of Hebrew and Canon of Christ Church. He had gained a very high reputation for learning before his death at the age of thirty-five. Dr. Pusey succeeded him as Regius Professor.

A volume of his sermons, with a biography prefixed, was published after his death by the Rev. J. Parsons, editor of the 'Oxford Septuagint.' There is a memorial to him in the Cathedral at Oxford, on the north wall; it bears a long Latin inscription, and has a medallion profile, showing a rather thin, intellectual face with a prominent nose. These last particulars are due to the kindness of the present Dean of Christ Church.

[1] Much of this section is taken from 'My Father: an Aberdeenshire Minister, by W. Robertson Nicoll,'—'a little book which I wrote at the suggestion of Lord Rosebery.'

scattered population earn their bread as tillers of the ground and keepers of cattle and sheep. It is a land of small farmers and crofters. In the valleys they grow barley and oats and turnips on fields divided by grey stone dykes, while their flocks wander grazing over the moors and high ground. Eighty or ninety years ago the region was full of smugglers, and no particular discredit attached to the practice. In fact it would have been impossible for those crofters to live, if they had not been able to add the gains of smuggling to the pittance they could win from the sterile soil.[1] When Nicoll was a child Lumsden had no butcher's shop.

Through its brief summer the rugged landscape brightens and the hills blush with purple heather. But in that latitude the long, black winter months are bitterly severe. Nicoll knew how to describe his native climate and its effects.

'Looking back, it is the winter that strikes me as the dominant influence of the region. It was very long and very rigorous. The countryside was famous for its snowstorms, the huge drifts they left behind them often impeding traffic for days. It was impossible to work out of doors during the dark and roaring nights and the scarcely brighter days. People were thus thrown upon their own resources, and were either made or marred by their use of the winter.

'In those days people either yielded to their circumstances or heroically overcame them. The hard manual toil by which daily bread was earned indisposed men to intellectual exertion ; base temptations were always at hand, and many relapsed into stark animalism. This was especially true of the agricultural labourers. The life of the bothy with its lewd songs and its gross talk, the fights at the "feeing markets," the deadness of aspiration, above all perhaps the miserable intemperance of the class, present problems which are still unsolved. But those who escaped all this usually did so by complete separation and strict adherence to a lofty and rigorous code of self-discipline. Religion, in most cases, had laid its strong

[1] Cf. 'James Macdonell, Journalist,' by W. R. Nicoll, pp. 8, 14, 25, 26.

hand upon them, and the results were unmistakable. I can recall not a few grave-featured, reserved peasants whose sins—such as they were—must have been sins of omission only; for one could say of them with assurance, what Jess M'Qumpha said of her husband Hendry, that "he never did naething that wasna' well intended." Occasionally long and solitary brooding over religious themes produced a certain refinement and distinction of mind, which manifested itself in the supplications at little prayer-meetings, some of which still linger in my memory. More often the result was a homely and somewhat unmerciful shrewdness. What is true of the moral is true of the intellectual nature. Some who go to such places as ministers and teachers soon die an intellectual death. Others again are stirred to exceptional activity by the apathy around them, and from the stern and solitary region a goodly number have gone forth to take a prominent part in public life.[1]

'The religious forces of the time were those of that Evangelicalism which has been the base of so many powerful characters, even among those who have afterwards rejected it, like Cardinal Newman and George Eliot. These were reinforced by the influences of the Disruption, then at their strongest. If a cautious, reticent race, impatient of extravagant action and unmeasured speech, is to be found anywhere, it is among

[1] For example, George MacDonald, the poet and novelist, was born at Huntly; William Robertson Smith came from the Free Church manse of Keig; Alexander Mackay, of Uganda, the true successor of Livingstone, from the Free Church manse of Rhynie—a village which was also the birthplace of Sir Robert Donald, formerly editor of the *Daily Chronicle*. London journalism has drawn other notable recruits from Aberdeenshire, which claims to have 'more brains to the square mile than any other northern county.' These include such men as John Douglas Cook, the projector and first editor of the *Saturday Review*; James Macdonell, of the *Times*; Archibald Forbes, of the *Daily News*; Sir Hugh Gilzean Reid, first President of the Institute of Journalists; and Dr. J. M. Bulloch, editor of the *Graphic* from 1909 to 1924.

'The life of rural Aberdeenshire at this period has been set forth with marvellous fidelity by Dr. William Alexander, in his works *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* and *Life among My Ain Folk*, more especially, I venture to think, in the latter. Whoever wishes to understand the undemonstrative, douce, thrifty, plodding, unimaginative, and yet affectionate and sternly faithful nature of that particular variety of the Scot, will find it drawn to the life in these books.'—'James Macdonell,' by W. R. Nicoll, pp. 8, 9.

the peasants of Aberdeenshire ; but when possessed and stirred by religious feeling, they are capable of unyielding firmness and unstinted devotion. The preaching was intensely theological. The great highways of truth were trodden and retrodden. Texts were largely taken from the Epistles, and the doctrines of grace were accurately and thoroughly expounded. Freshness, style, and the other qualities now held essential to popular sermons were unknown. But the preaching did its work, nevertheless, as George MacDonald says, because it *was* preaching—the rare speech of a man to his fellows, whereby they know that he is in his inmost heart a believer.' [1]

When he was nearly forty the Rev. Harry Nicoll married Miss Jane Robertson, niece and adopted daughter of the Rev. William Robertson, Free Church minister of Aboyne. It was after this uncle that they named their eldest child, William Robertson Nicoll, born on October 10, 1851. About his mother, who died when he was just eight years old, her son left long afterwards the following brief, pathetic record :

' My mother was a bright, warm-hearted, eager girl, exceedingly well-educated for her time. Though she was sixteen years younger than her husband, the marriage was one of perfect union. It was clouded early by her falling into consumption. This seemed even to strengthen the tie between husband and wife. From the first she was associated with my father in his studies. His wedding gift to her was an Italian edition of Ariosto, and they read together regularly till her health broke down. After that, my father was in the habit of reading to her for hours every day. In spite of all that could be done my mother grew steadily weaker, and died eight years after her marriage, leaving four children.[2] I remember that on the night of

[1] ' W. G. Elmslie,' by W. R. Nicoll, pp. 7, 8, 11, 12.

[2] The children of the marriage were :
William Robertson, born 1851 ; died 1923, aged 71.
Maria (married Mr. Peter Logan, of Kelso), born 1853 ; died 1894, aged 41.
Eliza Williamina, born 1855 ; died 1873, aged 18.
George Smeaton, born 1856 ; died 1858, aged 2.
Henry James, born 1858 ; died 1885, aged 26.

her death my father announced the heavy tidings to the frightened little children huddled together in the kitchen. He told them with a smile, and we wondered why he smiled. Her death made a great difference to him, but he seldom spoke of her directly, only whenever anything fortunate happened he was sure to say, even to the very last, " I wish your mother had been here." '

The manse at Lumsden stood exposed to fierce gales sweeping down from the hills. To shelter it, the minister had planted trees so close that they shrouded the house and made it damp and sombre. Under that roof their mother's death came as an unspeakable, irreparable loss to her four forlorn little children. They were left entirely to the charge of one old Highland servant, who let them learn their lessons in her kitchen by the peat-fire on the hearth. And they had their father, for whom his eldest son cherished a deep reverence and affection. He has etched that father's likeness with filial piety. The Rev. Harry Nicoll reminds us of one of the insatiable scholars of the seventeenth century who had somehow strayed into the nineteenth. By temperament this remarkable man was a pure bookworm. He had no literary ambition, except the ambition to know. His learning never appeared in his sermons. For him, knowledge was its own sufficient reward. The ruling passion of his life was to read and to collect books; and he gratified it to an almost incredible extent, considering that his income never quite reached £200 a year and was often much nearer £100. Yet before he died he had contrived to accumulate 17,000 volumes—the largest private library of any minister in Scotland. He possessed, for example, about 100 different editions of the Greek Testament. Week by week he added fresh books, ordering most of them second-hand from Aberdeen or London, until they overflowed every room and passage in the manse. But he could have found any volume at night without a candle.

To amass such a library was possible only through the minister's rigidly ascetic habits. It accounted for

his shabby clothes and anxious expression and frugal fare. But it must undoubtedly have entailed privations on his children as well. Their comforts were stinted to pay for the volumes he was continually buying, and they would have been better nourished if he had refrained from buying so many.[1] Assuredly Nicoll drew on experience when he wrote of 'the austerity, the somewhat chilly rigour, which characterized manse life in the Free Church.' That manse at Lumsden, shadowed by the dark entail of consumption, was too much like the Brontë parsonage at Haworth. As the children grew up, more than one of them rebelled against its gloom. Nicoll himself confessed pathetically in after years, 'I always feel that I was defrauded of my youth—there was so little sunshine in it—far too little.'[2]

Such a lad, however, found immense compensations in such a library. Though it was richest in theology, Church history, and the Greek and Latin classics, the collector had a catholic taste which included all sides of literature. He thought the proper books for children were 'Don Quixote,' 'The Arabian Nights,' and 'The Pilgrim's Progress.'[3] Beginning with these, young Nicoll was allowed to browse at large among the crowded shelves. There he formed and fostered the quenchless love for books which dominated his whole career. To the end of his days he entered a library as a jockey enters a stable. While still a boy he devoured the novels of Scott, Disraeli, Bulwer Lytton, and Charlotte Brontë. 'The Caxtons' was one chief favourite, 'Frankenstein' another, while 'The Professor' 'was to me a honeycomb, and I have read it

[1] We learn with some relief that a cow was kept; but the household lived mainly on porridge, vegetables and dairy produce. Nicoll as a boy seldom tasted beef until he went to lodge in Aberdeen.

[2] Letter to the Rev. Alexander Rust in January 1902.

[3] 'My father took in *Hogg's Instructor* from the beginning, and we children used to read the old volumes very diligently. One long story "Memoranda of a Marine Officer," by the Rev. C. B. Greatorex, of Hope, Ludlow, gave me endless delight, and I read it at least fifty times.' This cheap weekly periodical had been founded in 1845 by Mr. James Hogg, an enterprising Edinburgh bookseller. The contributors included Thomas De Quincey, and Mr. James Hogg published the Edinburgh edition of De Quincey's collected works.

The Rev. Harry Nicoll

a hundred times.' He was at home in Emerson and Lowell and Longfellow. He used to say, half jestingly, that at fourteen he knew Johnson and Addison and Steele and Goldsmith better than he knew them forty years later. He read standard English works which nobody reads now except their editors. Even controversial theology attracted him. Bletsoe's 'Theodicy,' an American treatise, attempted to explain the origin of evil: but the schoolboy wrote a refutation in large round hand, proving that on Bletsoe's own principles heaven itself was insecure, since at any moment the angels might revolt again!

The father's attitude to his children in matters of religion was one of characteristic reticence. 'We knew that he was profoundly religious—that religion with him was first and last. We learned our psalms and chapters, and went to church and Sunday school. But my father never spoke directly to any of us about religion.'

When quite small, however, Nicoll went with his father to Huntly Lodge, where 'the good Duchess' of Gordon organized revival meetings in 1859 and 1860, and he always declared that this revival, and especially its hymns, made a deep impression on his young mind. 'Teach a little child hymns,' he would say, 'as the beginning of its theology.'

Nicoll at the age of eleven is described as a tiny vivacious creature, and a great chatterbox. He slept in a little back attic, lit from a skylight and reached by a ladder. While he lay in bed recovering from an illness, he had for company some old numbers of *Tait's Magazine*, and came across an article in which De Quincey quoted these verses by Allan Cunningham:

'Gane were but the winter cauld,
And gane were but the snaw,
I could sleep in the wild woods
Where primroses blaw.

'Cauld 's the snaw at my heid,
An' cauld, cauld at my feet,
And the finger o' death 's at my een,
Closing them to sleep.

'Let nane tell my father,
Or my mither sae dear;
I 'll meet them baith in heaven
At the spring-time o' the year.'

'These were the first verses that made me understand that there was such a thing as poetry.' [1] The boy was soon revelling in Hogg, and afterwards in Sydney Dobell and Alexander Smith and Gerald Massey—poets who at that time represented a new school and are to-day too contemptuously forgotten. He would wake early in his attic and lie there composing boyish verses at dawn. Then he found infinite delight in Longfellow's 'Hiawatha.' 'It first taught me to hear the voice of the woods, to discover that nature was not the dead thing I had fancied it but full of life and utterance.' Through the long winter evenings when the clock ticked slowly the son would sit reading in silence at the study table beside his father, who, however, was nervously apt to be jarred and startled if a chair were tilted or a book upset. But it was the father who first put into his son's hand the magic key of knowledge.

Bagehot describes the people who have known a time in life when there was no book they could not read. The fact of its being a book went immensely in its favour. 'In early life there is an opinion that the obvious thing to do with a horse is to ride it; with a cake, to eat it; with sixpence, to spend it. A few boys carry this further, and think the natural thing to do with a book is to read it.' Such a boy was Nicoll.

Scotland has conquered England by virtue of her parish schools. In Aberdeenshire villages the facilities for education were unusually good. The parish schoolmasters, whose salaries were increased by certain wise and liberal bequests, were almost without exception accomplished scholars, and held a position of considerable dignity and influence. They took pride in any promising pupil, and would cheerfully work extra hours to ensure his success. The fees were

[1] Letter from Nicoll to A. T. Quiller-Couch, September 1899.

sufficiently moderate, £1 being enough to cover all expenses for a year. At these schools a boy might remain till he was fourteen or fifteen, and then compete for a bursary at Aberdeen, where some forty bursaries were annually open, varying from £35 a year downwards, and tenable through the four years of the University course.

When Nicoll reached the age of eight—in the year when his mother died—he entered the parish school of Auchindoir to begin Latin. The school building consisted of one large room, with a class-room attached. The master had no assistant, except a pupil teacher, in dealing with sometimes 130 scholars. Many of them were mere children, though in winter a number of farm servants would come to school. There were only three 'Latiners,' who sat together in a special class near the master's desk and became fast friends. Besides Nicoll, the other two were Robert W. Reid, younger son of the Established Church minister[1] of Auchindoir, who was for thirty-six years the Regius Professor of Anatomy in Aberdeen; and Henry Stephen, afterwards Dr. Henry Stephen of Calcutta University and a potent intellectual and Christian influence in India. Both Reid and Nicoll considered Stephen the most gifted of the three, who were all remembered as being unusually shy.

Schoolboys, however, forget to be shy in their play. These village lads knew nothing of the 'organized games' of a modern school. They had no cricket and no proper football; but they had, said Nicoll, 'the unfailing resource of marbles—the only game in which I ever showed the smallest skill. At one time I was the proud possessor of more than 150 marbles, all honestly won by the labour of my own hands.'

His first schoolmaster, Mr. John Wilson, was a very able man, touched with originality if not with genius, who later became the rector of Banff Academy. Nicoll described him as a born teacher, implacably just, though of uncertain temper and with a caustic

[1] The Rev. William Reid's elder son became Major-General Sir A. J. F. Reid, K.C.B., a distinguished soldier in the army in India.

tongue. Mr. Wilson certainly understood one secret of education. 'When we had mastered the elements of Latin and were able to read with some facility, we could see that the literary side of Virgil and Tacitus was what had an endless attraction for our teacher. Horace too was a great favourite, especially the more pathetic lyrics, those which express the frailty and the evanescence of life. Mr. Wilson did us a rare service in bringing to our minds at that early and susceptible age a sense of the beauty and the glory of literature. It was he who taught me that Homer and Virgil were poets to be read and enjoyed. Moreover he set us to think for ourselves, and he criticized what we were reading. Thus, when we had gone over Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, he asked us to sum up and review Goldsmith's political economy. He was one of those who awaken the soul, and to whom old pupils look back with gratitude, all the more because he did not try to force his own opinions upon them.' [1]

Mr. Wilson spared no pains over these three pupils, in whom he took immense interest and pride. He left Lumsden in 1864, and in the autumn of 1866 the three lads entered Aberdeen University together. Nicoll's rustic boyishness comes out in the following quaint reminiscence: 'I remember when the time came for my going to college, my chief bitterness in the thought was that I should be compelled to give up playing marbles, a game of which I was passionately fond. It would not be dignified for a Scotch student to play marbles, and it did not seem as if life would be worth living without them.'

[1] 'Rambling Remarks' in the *British Weekly* of November 29, 1900.

NOTE.—According to *Scottish Notes and Queries* for June 1925, the village of Lumsden was founded in 1825 on what was then 'a desolate moor.'

## CHAPTER II

### AT ABERDEEN

Sixty years ago the grey granite city, 'looking out on the cold North Sea,' contained under 90,000 inhabitants and lay further removed than it does to-day from the chief centres of thought. But all the north-east counties of Scotland regarded Aberdeen as their focus and capital. Its weekly journals spread light into the towns and villages within a very wide radius. For centuries it had been a home of learning, and its ancient University formed the Mecca of every studious lad's dream. To a youth who came up there from the isolation of his birthplace among the glens, Aberdeen meant more than any other city could afterwards become. To enter it was to pass from prison into a larger air, to taste the sweets of comradeship and liberty.

Nicoll's first journey by rail took him to Aberdeen as a diminutive boy of twelve with his father, to see Queen Victoria in pouring rain unveil an ugly bronze statue of the Prince Consort. The boy suffered bitter disenchantment when he trod the streets of the city which his fancy had pictured as something marvellous and magnificent out of the 'Arabian Nights.' Two years later, in April 1866, he was sent to Aberdeen Grammar School [1] with the idea that he should take twelve months' preparation for the University. He and his school-mate, Andrew Craik,[2] a lad from Kirrie-

[1] At this school Byron had been a junior pupil. The fee for a day-scholar was 17s. 6d. per quarter. The Rector of the school in Nicoll's time was Dr. William Barrack, an excellent teacher. He drilled his top class in extempore translation from English into Latin—skill in which then counted most in the examination for bursaries.

[2] Craik graduated at Aberdeen in the same year as Nicoll and went up to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he became Fourth Wrangler in 1874, dying shortly afterwards.

muir, lodged together in two attics. Nicoll was so innocent of towns that on his first night in lodgings he did not know how to put out the gas. At the Grammar School his chosen comrade was Robert Neil, whose father had been an old college friend of the minister of Auchindoir. In the bursary competition in October 1866 both were successful; out of a maximum of 1200 marks, the highest candidate gained 955, Neil 772, and Nicoll 770.[1] Thus the friends started their university course together at the beginning of November 1866, when Nicoll had just turned fifteen while Neil was several months younger. In after life he realized the grave disadvantage of this premature entrance. 'I entirely agree that we went too soon to college. We were too young to have a fair chance. The first two years I hardly understood what was going on. It was only in the third session that my mind woke. If I had been a couple of years older it would have been quite different and in every way better.'[2] It followed that he graduated at Aberdeen when he was eighteen and a half—the age when clever English boys would be leaving a public school. One result was that Nicoll, notwithstanding his very great intellectual power, never became a finished classical scholar, in the strict academic sense of the term.

Aberdeen University had been unified in 1860 by the fusion of King's College and Marischal College, but it was still very far from modernized. Nor could it be said to stand in the front rank of British Universities. In the four Faculties of Arts, Divinity, Law, and Medicine there were altogether twenty-one professors and between 500 and 600 students. The freshmen were styled 'bajans'; in their second session they became 'semis'; and in their third session 'tertians.' Among the youngest of the bajans in 1866 was a boy in a grey suit, with blue eyes and laughing mouth and

[1] Nicoll's success was quite unexpected. Many years afterwards he pictured himself going back exultant to Lumsden with his great news, and hardly conscious of the long climb from the station up to his father's manse among the hills.

[2] Letter to the Rev. W. M'Robbie, December 5, 1908.

something of a scholar's stoop even then.[1] Nicoll's experience as an Arts student began at 9 A.M. on November 6, in the great gaunt class-room of King's College, sacred to 'Hellenic studies' under Professor Geddes. The class numbered 118, nearly all Scotsmen from Aberdeenshire and the adjoining counties. One after another they would be called up to construe a few lines from the *Orestes* or the *Anabasis* or the *Iliad*—after the dull fashion of a school rather than a college. To Arts students in their first session Professor Maclure taught Latin, Professor Bain taught English Literature, and Professor Fuller mathematics. This went on—four classes a day—for five months, with a short break at Christmas and the New Year, until the spring examinations, after which the students scattered to assemble again in the autumn.

In their third session Arts students took Natural History under Professor James Nicol and Logic under Professor Bain, besides Natural Philosophy under Professor Thomson and Higher Mathematics under Professor Fuller; and in their fourth session they studied Moral Philosophy under Professor Martin.

Chief among the professors for intellectual force was Dr. Alexander Bain, a very strong and remarkable personality, who held the Chair of Logic from 1860 to 1880, and afterwards was twice chosen Lord Rector. He was perhaps the only Aberdeen professor of that period who was widely known beyond the north of Scotland. In days when utilitarian philosophers like Mill and Grote and Spencer exerted great and growing influence, Bain stood out as a powerful teacher of their school. Unfortunately, he was required also to lecture on English literature [2] to students in their first session, and Nicoll describes the impression he produced :—

'Bain was a man with no imagination, who could not even appreciate imagination in others. He had not the faintest notion of what poetry was. Love-poetry in particular had no meaning for him. His

[1] Letter to W. R. Nicoll from his fellow-student, Dr. John Gordon.

[2] It may be noted, however, that in English literature Cambridge University, for instance, at that date provided no teaching at all.

criticisms were often quite comical. On Tennyson's lines,

> Her feet have touch'd the meadows,
> And left the daisies rosy,

he observed that it was a strong hyperbole, but that it "retained a slight hold on actual facts." There was one stock phrase which he used almost every time he dealt with a love-song: according to him, it "exceeded the bounds of propriety." He was dry, dry as the sands of Arabia.'

Geddes, the Professor of Greek, afterwards became Principal of the University. Those who shared his enthusiasm for his subject regarded him with high admiration and found him a most stimulating teacher. Idlers quailed under his eagle glance. The students named him 'Homer,' from his mastery of the Greek epic. At that time, however, he had not yet worked out the revolutionary criticism which made Mr. Gladstone describe his book on the Homeric problem as 'a slashing of Hector.' Certainly he did more than any other man to improve the knowledge of classics, and especially of Greek, at Aberdeen. He was not only an accurate scholar but a true humanist, with a deep love of literature, and he held that the glory of a country is pre-eminently in its authors.

No more lucid and effective teacher of mathematics could have been found than Professor Fuller. An English gentleman to the core, he treated his crowd of rough northern students with great urbanity, and did his utmost to make the subject clear to every one of them.

James Nicol—affectionately known as 'Jeems'—was Professor of Natural History. This homely, kindly man had a hoarse voice and an aspect as of the old red sandstone. 'An extraordinary competency marked him when he handled stones and skeletons and explained them. He did his work most faithfully, but the range of subjects was too wide. For my own part, I learned a number of lists by heart and came off with great credit but without any real knowledge of the

The Old Manse, Lumsden, Seventy Years Ago

subject. That was not the fault of the professor : it was the fault of the system.'

Professor David Thomson taught Natural Philosophy with admirable efficiency and occasional dry humour, expressed in a broad north-country accent. Among all his colleagues he was perhaps the most original and cynical character.

The Professor of Moral Philosophy was Dr. William Martin,[1] a conscientious and sincerely religious man, spoiled by self-complacency like Malvolio's. He had published pamphlets bearing such titles as 'British Infidelity : Its Aspects and Prospects,' and he firmly believed that his own lectures were the best in the world. As a teacher, however, he utterly failed to keep order, and he became the entertainment, if not the butt, of his pupils. Professor Martin had one famous and venerable lecture on Conscience which he would deliver with the utmost vehemence, though its eloquent periods were received with unseemly mirth and frantic applause. Occasionally his class-room resembled Bedlam—when, for instance, a fowl was secretly introduced and let loose during lecture. On Sunday evenings he instituted a Bible class, which met in his lodgings until the orgies became so pronounced that his landlady revolted and the class had to migrate to a room outside. The professor invited this class to choose between Romans and Hebrews as a subject for his lessons, and Nicoll describes how posters were put out imploring men to 'Vote for Hebrews and Poll Early' : Hebrews won.

The most faithful pictures of Aberdeen student life at this period are to be found in George MacDonald's early novel 'Alec Forbes,' and in Dr. Walter Smith's 'Borland Hall.' It was emphatically a period of plain living and hard work. The characteristic of the place was a limitless persistency of application, inspired by secret ambition and enforced with stern self-denial.

Many years later Nicoll wrote : 'The University course in my days embraced Greek, Latin, Mathe-

[1] Nicoll contributed a racy though not unkindly sketch of this professor to *Aurora Borealis Academica*, 1899.

matics, Natural Philosophy, Logic, Moral Philosophy, English, and Natural Science. We had to spend four years in these studies, and pass examinations in them all, before receiving the degree of Master of Arts. I venture to think that the course was good and comprehensive. But unquestionably many students in my time failed to do themselves justice through sheer immaturity.'

'Then we were poor—poor, I imagine, to a degree quite unknown now. In such a matter it is well to have definite figures, and as I have a lively recollection of my expenses, I will set them down. I had an attic of my own, serving the purpose of sitting-room and bedroom, for four shillings a week. My bill for food amounted to another four shillings, and it was expected that all my expenses of every kind should be covered by two shillings more, and this was done. My bursary of £11 a year paid the fees, and left a little over; and I received in addition boxes from home containing fowls, oatcakes, eggs, and other edibles. These presents were very acceptable, and country students almost invariably imparted them generously to their friends when they arrived. There were students to my knowledge who had a whole pound a week to spend, but this was uncommon and was considered luxurious and extravagant. There were students even poorer than myself, and I am firmly convinced that one, who was not in my class though well known to me, died of sheer starvation. Poor fellow! he had in a corner of his room a large barrel of meal, and he seemed to get all his sustenance out of that barrel. Parents, remembering the Spartan discipline of their own early days, were apt to be somewhat inconsiderate of the needs of a growing lad. Many of us had our constitutions permanently impaired by lack of good and adequate food. Far too large a proportion of my fellow students died early.' [1]

[1] Parts of this and the following paragraphs are abridged from an article on 'The Country Student of Forty Years Ago,' by W. R. Nicoll, printed in the quatercentenary number of *Alma Mater*, the Aberdeen University Review, September 1906.

'My bosom friend at College was R. A. Neil,[1] and he and I bought regularly a penny tart in Old Aberdeen at an interval between classes. By the middle of January we found that we could not afford this, and we had to go without till our bursaries were paid. Neil after that used to rattle the silver pieces in his trouser-pocket and declare himself to be "in easy if not affluent circumstances." We made no complaint of our poor fare, and took things as they came. Neil used to say, looking back, "We were so young and so poor." In spite of our happiness, and it was very real, I think now that we were too young and too poor.'[2]

Contrasted with the comforts which surround an English undergraduate at Trinity or Magdalen to-day, privations like these appear remote, unreal, well-nigh incredible. But Scottish students faced them and conquered them sixty years ago at Aberdeen.

Nevertheless 'there were many compensations for youth and poverty. In the first place, it was a glorious thing to be a student. "Oh, that God would spare me to wear the red cloakie!" was the aspiration of Rabbi Duncan when he was a youth. It was the aspiration of every ambitious lad in the north. The reality was as good as the dream. We used to march through the streets with conscious pride in our tattered red gowns, positively enjoying the objurgations of the street-boys. Then there was no ordinary pride in coming into contact with the famous professors. Professors were esteemed in the north of Scotland at that time as no other men were. They were regarded as Emerson tells us scholars were regarded in his New England. A professorship was the *summum bonum* of life. The

[1] After graduating at Aberdeen with high honours in 1870, Neil proceeded to Cambridge, where he became Second Classic in 1876; Fellow, Lecturer, and Tutor of Pembroke; and University Reader in Sanscrit from 1882 till his death in 1901. Nicoll described him as a thorough, accurate, and finished scholar, with broad culture and an immense range of knowledge—a don with no donnishness: 'I can think of nothing in his career to be regretted or palliated.' Miss Jane Harrison, who met him often at Cambridge, refers to 'Robert Neil, of Pembroke, whose sympathetic Scotch silences made the dreariest gathering burn and glow.'

[2] Abridged from 'The Homes of the Rural Students, 1866–1870,' by W. R. Nicoll, in the *Aberdeen University Review*, November 1913.

professors were conscious of their dignity. Between them and the rank and file of students generally there was no personal relationship of any kind outside the class. This was not resented. All we expected was courteous recognition when we took off our caps in the street. Among the students themselves the sentiment was altogether democratic. The only distinction was the distinction of learning and ability. Any other qualification would have been fiercely resented. The son of a ploughman was on equal terms with the son of a professor, and might be recognized as his superior.

'The whole atmosphere of the place was one of hard, steady labour. Most of the men were aware that they were having their one chance in life, and if they threw it away they never could repair the loss. The great majority worked. Very few indulged in sports of any kind. I never remember hearing of any among my fellow students who was distinguished as an athlete. General reading was strongly disapproved. I remember one famous student severely reprimanding me for having been seen in the news room. Occasionally the fervid genius of the north broke through all repressions in an astonishing way. Those who know what the life of the students was will not chide their outbursts in connection with rectorial elections and the like. On the occasion of one election [1] in which I took a very active part, I was blinded by a stone in the eye a week before my examination, and I have a certain pride in recalling the fact. The best proof that the system was good, and that the tone of the place was on the whole high, is found in the fact that Aberdeen students have done so well in life.

'But perhaps the chief delight of those college days was the close and cordial friendships maintained among the students. Every one had his comrades. I had a few of the best and kindest anywhere to be found. None of us had much to give, but what we had we

[1] In 1866, during Nicoll's first session, M. E. Grant-Duff was elected Lord Rector, against George Grote, the historian. The fight referred to, in which stones were used, took place on the occasion when Grant-Duff delivered his first address as Lord Rector. He was re-elected for a second term in 1869-70. Riotous scenes occurred at these elections.

gave. Many were the glorious evenings I have spent in little attic rooms, discussing and hearing discussions on endless things! Of political and ecclesiastical differences we never talked. I remember it so happened that my most intimate friends were opposed to me in both subjects. But we were thinking of other matters. Literature was a great theme, and Burns the hero. At the Debating Society all sorts of subjects were taken up, and well argued they were.'

Outside the debating room and the football ground Aberdeen students at that time possessed no common centre or club where they could naturally come together. As a rule their social intercourse had to be carried on within the narrow walls of each other's lodgings. Yet even under such conditions kindred minds discovered one another,

> 'Brought together by chances strange,
> Knit together by friendships sweet.'

Bagehot has described from his own experience [1] how 'in youth, the real plastic energy is not in tutors, or lectures, or in books "got up," but in Wordsworth and Shelley, in the books that all read because all like; in what all talk of because all are interested; in the argumentative walk or disputatious lounge; in the impact of young thought upon young thought, of fresh thought on fresh thought, of hot thought on hot thought; in mirth and refutation, in ridicule and laughter; for these are the free play of the natural mind.'

This deep and enduring effect of university life has been analysed by one of the most distinguished sons of Oxford:—

'When a multitude of young men, keen, open-hearted, sympathetic, and observant, as young men are, come together and freely mix with each other, they are sure to learn one from another, even if there be no one to teach them; the conversation of all is a series of lectures to each, and they gain for themselves

[1] In an article on 'Oxford Reform' in the *Prospective Review*, No. 31, for August 1852.

new ideas and views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles for judging and acting, day by day. That youthful community will constitute a whole, it will embody a specific idea, it will represent a doctrine, it will administer a code of conduct, and it will furnish principles of thought and action. It will give birth to a living teaching, which in course of time will take the shape of a self-perpetuating tradition, or a *genius loci*, as it is sometimes called ; which haunts the home where it has been born, and which imbues and forms, more or less, and one by one, every individual who is successively brought under its shadow.' [1]

Aberdeen left an ineffaceable stamp on Nicoll. For him, to the end of his days, there was no other university like it. During his course as a student he won hardly any prizes or honours, mainly because in his passion for English literature he devoted himself to subjects outside the fixed academic routine. Already he was known as a very wide reader. No one could oftener be met carrying off books from the Library or the Mechanics' Institute. Dr. A. Shewan writes : ' I recall him as a retiring youth, shy to most people, and perhaps a little awkward in manner, as most of us were. With a congenial and beloved friend in Neil and with English literature to roam through, he no doubt had a happy, if inconspicuous, student life. Probably none of us would have prophesied for him the career he achieved for himself.' But the beginnings of that career were already discernible. During his student years Nicoll used to haunt the Corn Exchange Reading Room in Aberdeen, to pore over newspapers and periodicals. There he delved into bound sets of the *Athenaeum* and the *National Review*. His earliest printed article seems to have appeared when he was only seventeen in a Dundee journal, the *People's Friend*, for August 4, 1869. The subject was ' Henry Fielding, the Novelist,' and the writer characteristically declared that ' Tom Jones ' reminds us somewhat of ' a greater than Fielding—we venture to say a greater novelist than any the world has yet produced—Charles

[1] J. H. Newman, 'The Idea of a University' (Ed. 1891), pp. 146-7.

Dickens.' In August 1870, an article he wrote on Charles Dickens, who had died two months earlier, was published in the same journal. Its Christmas number for 1868 had included a poem from his pen.

The sons of Free Church ministers in those days, whatever university honours they might win, generally desired no higher position than that of their fathers. It had always been understood that Nicoll would enter the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. That Church is honourably distinguished by the severe theological training which it requires. After graduating M.A. in March 1870, Nicoll entered the Free Church College, Aberdeen, at the end of October, when he was just nineteen, for a four years' course. The students were not numerous—about thirty, all told. In the entrance examination William M'Robbie, his intimate friend,[1] won the first bursary, while Nicoll came out second. Another dear and life-long friend at the Divinity Hall was Alexander Rust.[2] These 'Three Musketeers,' as they styled themselves, drew together in close fellowship which endured for over half a century.

The professors under whom they studied were men of distinction. Principal Lumsden, whose noble-looking head was fringed with snowy hair, expounded the doctrines of Calvinism in rugged, uncompromising style. But his high courage, coupled with his devout and tender faith, gave him a profound influence over his students. Professor David Brown, who was afterwards Principal, Nicoll ranked among the most brilliant men he had ever known. Dr. Brown seldom took sufficient pains to do himself justice. His eager and curious mind made him more of a humanist than his colleagues, while he had also a fervent sympathy with revival Christianity. Side by side with these elderly and conservative teachers stood Robertson

[1] Mr. M'Robbie settled as minister of the Free Church at Premnay, which he served devotedly until his retirement in 1921. In a letter dated December 22, 1923, he writes of Nicoll: 'We enjoyed a close and unclouded friendship for upwards of fifty years.'

[2] Mr. Rust became minister of the Free Church at Arbroath, and has only recently retired after forty-eight years of faithful service. Nicoll made this trusted friend an executor of his will.

Smith, whom the Free Church had appointed in 1870 to the Chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Criticism in its College at Aberdeen. Nicoll listened to his inaugural lecture, delivered when he was barely twenty-four, on 'What History teaches us to seek in the Bible.' His youthfulness, his astonishing range of knowledge, his masterly intellect, his frank accessible nature won him general admiration and good will. Though in every way a contrast to Principal Lumsden, the two were united by close personal affection. 'Smith has a small but very select and valuable library. He prided himself on his editions of the Schoolmen, and when I had to write for him a Latin thesis on Predestination he insisted on my reading the relevant parts of these. He taught us above most things to go to the original authorities, and not to accept second-hand compilations. I think few of us then valued him as we should have done.' [1]

Another lecturer who visited the College for part of each session was Dr. Alexander Duff—still remembered in India as a Christian missionary and educationist—who had founded a school for boys at Calcutta which grew into the famous Duff College. Nicoll, however, found him curiously uninspiring.

During his four years as a theological student Nicoll kept a rough note-book or journal, which preserves not a few revealing details. It shows that in English literature he carefully studied and summarized numbers of standard books, by no means severely theological. Thus, he went through Boswell's 'Johnson,' and Lockhart's 'Scott,' and Crabb Robinson's 'Diary,' besides quantities of fiction. He was immensely impressed by the poetry of D. G. Rossetti. He continued not only to read all the current reviews and magazines, but to explore old volumes of periodicals like the

[1] W. R. Nicoll in the *Union Magazine*, 1901. Writing in 1908 about the appointment of a theological professor, Nicoll asked: 'Do you not think it is almost impossible to say who are the men who will influence students? In my time in Aberdeen we had Lumsden, David Brown, and Robertson Smith. Of the three, Lumsden had infinitely the most influence, though he was rugged and stern in manner and most uncompromising in orthodoxy.'

*Photo. Wilson, Aberdeen*

W. R. Nicoll, at the Age of Twenty one

*Contemporary*, the *Fortnightly*, and the *Scottish Review*. The Rev. Dr. W. S. Bruce of Banff, his fellow student and friend at Aberdeen, bears witness that Nicoll was always equal to the work of his classes, and a great favourite with both professors and students. Dr. Bruce recalls his bright, cheerful disposition, his talk bubbling with wit and humour, his extensive reading and his astonishing memory, and adds: 'On religious experience he was wisely reticent; but all the same his experience was deep and true, and his sincerity in Christian service was unquestionable.'

After he had once graduated, Nicoll never cost his father another penny. To support himself he gave lessons regularly to classes of boys and of girls in private schools and families in Aberdeen. It appears that as payment for some of this teaching he received no more than a shilling an hour! The note-book includes brief vivid characterizations of his pupils, one by one. After describing a class of fifteen girls, aged from 14 to 19, whom he had taught for six months, he adds: 'It says something for my philosophy that I never cared a straw for any of these girls.'

Besides his private tuition Nicoll embarked upon regular work as a journalist. At that time Aberdeen possessed three weekly newspapers, which cost threepence or fourpence a copy. The *Aberdeen Journal*, the earliest newspaper to be published north of Edinburgh, had then the largest circulation of the three. It was edited by William Forsyth, whom Nicoll described as 'my beloved and honoured friend, a man of true poetic genius and a most gentle nature.' The *Aberdeen Free Press*, the Nonconformist and advanced Liberal paper, had been founded in 1853 by William M'Combie, whose gifts and character made him 'perhaps, after Hugh Miller, the most notable among the self-taught men of Scotland.' In 1872 it began a daily issue. At that time the editor was Dr. William Alexander, the gifted author of 'Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk,' which paints so vivid a picture of Aberdeenshire folk. The third paper was the *Aberdeen Herald*.

During the whole of his theological course Nicoll was on the regular staff of the *Journal*. He supplied many of its reviews, literary notes, and a weekly column entitled ' Things in General,' signed *Quid Nunc*, besides often writing articles on non-political subjects. His note-book shows that at the same time he was occasionally contributing to the *Scotsman*, the *Dundee Advertiser*, the *People's Friend*, the *Literary World*, *Once a Week*, and the *Banffshire Journal*. Many years afterwards he wrote :—' To the best of my belief I had one article rejected and one poem. But I was not overambitious, and carefully adapted my articles to the papers to which they were sent.' [1] From James Payn, who was then editing *Chambers's Journal*, ' I first received encouragement in literature.'

By tireless industry Nicoll, at the age of twenty, was earning over £100 a year. ' I had a £15 bursary, I made £40 a year by journalism, and £50 by private teaching, and I saved money.' But it was a strenuous existence. He started each morning in time to take his English literature class in a school at nine ; a class in another school followed at ten ; and a third at eleven. At noon he went to the College, where he attended theological lectures till three. Returning to his lodgings he dined, and soon after started off on another round of private teaching which lasted till six or eight o'clock. He used to devote most of his Saturdays to preparing two, and sometimes three, columns for the *Aberdeen Journal*. Such labour recalls Dickens's picture of David Copperfield, when ' he rose at five, walked from the Strand to Highgate to work for Dr. Strong, filled in the day with his legal duties, worked with Dr. Strong in the evening, and learned shorthand in his spare moments.' [2]

In 1871 Nicoll won a prize for an essay on ' The Control of Will over the Emotions.' He began German, in a class conducted by Robertson Smith. He studied Spinoza, and wrote an elaborate epitome

[1] Letter to the Editor of the *Newspaper World*, October 22, 1915.

[2] See ' W. Robertson Nicoll, LL.D., Editor and Preacher,' by Jane T. Stoddart, a volume to which the present writer is under deep obligation.

of his system. He was elected a member of the Aberdeen University Literary Society, before which he read a paper on Charlotte Brontë.

In 1872, at the age of twenty-one, Nicoll was 'licensed to preach' by the Presbytery of Alford, of which his father was clerk; and on May 12, in the mission hall of Kinnoir, near Huntly, he delivered his first sermon. Several months later he preached for the first time in a church—it was the Free Church at Braemar—the text being Psalm 110: 1, and the subject 'God behind Christ.' The six summer months of 1873 he spent as 'student missionary' at Banchory, then a small place eighteen miles from Aberdeen. Part of his duty was to conduct services in outlying districts. A friend [1] recalls his slight figure, with boyish hairless face, climbing the steps of the high pulpit in Banchory Free Church, arrayed in the minister's gown which was so much too long that he had to gather up the folds in both hands. During the same summer Nicoll, M'Robbie, and Rust paid their first visit to the Continent. They started with £13 apiece, and resolved to turn back as soon as they had spent half their money. Sailing from Aberdeen to Leith and Antwerp, they managed to reach Schaffhausen, and returned by Brussels, Waterloo, and Rotterdam, enjoying every hour of their trip which lasted over a fortnight and was a masterpiece of planning, pluck, and economy.

In October 1873, Nicoll returned to Aberdeen for his fourth session at the Divinity Hall. The University Literary Society elected him its Vice-President, the President being his friend William Minto. This brilliant graduate was then assistant in English to Professor Bain. From 1874 to 1878 Minto edited the *Examiner*, and offered Nicoll a post on its staff; he testified that 'there are few men whose acquaintance with our literature is more thorough, or whose insight is more delicate and profound.' But the Divinity student refused to turn aside from his vocation. At the close of his theological course, in April 1874, Nicoll

[1] The Rev. George Henderson, now minister of the U.F. Church, Monzie, Crieff.

stood second in the College exit examination, gaining a scholarship of £40, while M'Robbie was first. For the summer Nicoll as a ' probationer ' took temporary charge of the Free Church at Rayne, an agricultural village about twenty-five miles north-west of Aberdeen. Here he came upon a complete set of Spurgeon's sermons, up to date, and read them all through.

That same year witnessed a widespread revival of religious earnestness in Scotland. It seemed as though some one set to music the tune which had been haunting thousands of ears. The movement was intimately connected with meetings held in many towns and cities by Mr. D. L. Moody—the most capable, honest, and unselfish evangelist of the last generation. Whatever judgment be formed as to his creed or his methods, it is beyond question that no modern mission preacher stirred such multitudes of men and women to begin a new life. During the six months which Nicoll spent at Rayne he found spiritual interest strangely quickened all through the countryside. The scattered population gathered eagerly to special evangelistic services, while enduring results were produced in numbers of human lives. The glow and ardour of these experiences left a permanent impress on Nicoll himself. In seasons of low spiritual temperature Christian theology always tends to become formal, frigid, scholastic ; whereas it unfolds its hidden meaning and reveals its burning reality whenever souls catch fire.

This section may fitly conclude with a prayer inscribed by Nicoll in the note-book already mentioned.

*Deus, qui me adhuc juvasti, da mihi veniam pro peccatis meis, et da mihi vim et sapientiam ut illa tibi grata faciam.*

## CHAPTER III

### AT DUFFTOWN

In the course of the summer months he spent at Rayne, Nicoll received 'calls' from Free Church congregations at Rhynie, close to Lumsden, and at Dufftown. In November 1874, he settled at Dufftown, a small place in Banffshire, containing from 1200 to 1500 inhabitants and known for its distilleries. He remembered it as 'a beautiful and romantic little Highland town with a fine tonic air. The people were peculiarly friendly, hearty and kind. They were half Highlanders, to say the least, although very few of them spoke Gaelic, and they had the bearing and the characteristics of Highland gentlemen. Not one face was ever turned upon me except in the utmost good will. My house was a substantial and comfortable building, and having saved £200 by teaching, writing, and a scholarship, I was able to furnish a few rooms decently without running into debt. My church was of the old-fashioned kind, without any architectural pretensions, but it had inestimable acoustic qualities, and every one in the audience could hear a whisper.' [1]

Here Nicoll's ordination took place on November 18, 1874—a bitterly cold, snowy day. The service in the afternoon was followed by a crowded and enthusiastic meeting at night. His friends Rust and M'Robbie were present and spoke. The Rev. Harry Nicoll gave an impressive address. 'I think I can now hear his clear shrill voice as he said, referring to his son, "He has been three and twenty years with me and I am not tired of him yet, and I hope he will be three and twenty years with you and that you will

[1] Claudius Clear: 'My First House,' in the *British Weekly*, May 20, 1915.

not be tired of him." '[1] On the next Sunday morning the new minister preached on 'Thy gentleness hath made me great,' and at night on the parable of the Rich Fool.

Nicoll speedily stirred the little town with enthusiasm and at the same time filled his pews. At that date no service was held in the Established Church on Sunday night, and the evening sermons of the Free Church minister drew overflowing congregations. One aged man, a Waterloo veteran well over ninety, who had grown deaf, would sit on the pulpit steps so that he might miss nothing. The preacher, however, had his own misgivings and heart-searchings. To a friend he wrote: 'I made a very sad mess of my New Year's Day sermon. The text was "By the grace of God I am what I am." The sermon was nothing. This may be partly accounted for by its not being very fully written. Really the humiliation which a minister has to endure from failures in preaching is inconceivable. When I came out, I thought I would never be able to make a good sermon again.'[2]

Nicoll also gathered a Bible class of over 100 members, who included young people from all the other churches in the town. Half a century later one old lady confessed how 'the talks he gave us in that class showed a new side of life to me altogether. He just changed life for me, and for many others.' Before he left, his Church-roll had increased until it registered over 200 communicants.

People at Dufftown still recall his singularly boyish appearance. One devout woman prayed for him as 'the stripling.' An elderly Church-member, when he knocked at her door, greeted him with 'Fat are ye wantin', laddie?' and when he explained that he was the new minister, rejoined, 'Come awa' ben, but ye 're awfu' young.'[3] Another old lady still speaks of his quiet, gentle influence: he was 'so humorous and

[1] Letter from the Rev. W. M'Robbie, March 8, 1924.

[2] Letter to the Rev. George Henderson, January 4, 1875. Yet MS. notes of these Dufftown sermons contain paragraphs which might belong to leading articles in the *British Weekly*.

[3] Letter from Mrs. Milne, Dufftown, May 13, 1924.

homely,' so kind to folk in trouble, 'so plain among the people.'

Miss Mary Symon, of Dufftown, preserves vivid recollections of Nicoll. He seemed very young, and somewhat shy and retiring. But he appealed even to the uncritical intelligence as some one out of the common. 'Aul' Kirkers' flocked to hear him—a real tribute in days when to many the Disruption was no misty legend but a biting reality of partisan conflicts and personal feuds. Miss Symon describes him as 'a seraph with a cerebrum plus a bow-tie. . . . He wrote verse too, and was always "trokkin" with eschatology and criticism. . . . Once he was discovered consuming a "jam piece" [a quarter of oatcake spread with currant jam] seated by the reekin' peat fire of an old wifie who, from "moggans to mutch," was chronically blacker than the crook.'

Miss Symon records also how crisply Nicoll was characterized by an ancient relative of her own :—'A sma'-bookit, mire-snipe-y bit chielie, gey an' aften wi' a red nose an' a gravat [cravat] aboot 'is neck, gyan ploit ploiterin' doon the street to the post-offish i' the gloamin' wi' a lang fite envelope in 's han'—oh, but a pleasant craitur he was—nae bergin, or bletherin', or show-off wi' 'im, fut a pleasant craitur—verra pleasant.'

Long afterwards a friendly hand wrote : 'Dufftown survivors recall how the boyish-looking Free Church minister brought into our secluded life fresh thoughts and new emotions which, without ingratitude to the old, we were thirsty to drink of. Who that heard and saw can forget the eager face and pleading voice as he would lean forward over the clasped hands laid on the pulpit? How keenly the preacher felt, how livingly he believed! Even in that early seed-time we had vague inklings of his literary proclivities. Weird legends grew up : he was keeping London editors and presses busy ; he wrote an undecipherable hand, needing sometimes to open his own letters to help the postman out of difficulties of address. All this increased the awe with which the young, going to and from

school, would watch the slim overcoated figure, crowned with the squashiest of squash hats and marked by a curious shrinking gesture of the shoulders, slip rapidly along the street.' [1]

Dufftown stands in a district from 600 to 900 feet above sea-level, among hills rising to 2000 feet. On those bracing uplands the winters are terribly austere. Again and again Nicoll wrote of being snow-bound and receiving no letters. 'Our country people are very much scattered and mostly snowed up, and few of them have been in church for the last three weeks.' 'We are, of course, in the midst of a violent snow-storm, and I am without other company than my books and papers.' 'The storm set in with redoubled severity. It has by no means subsided.' Forty years later Nicoll himself described how remarkably this isolation had reacted on his mental development.

'I lived alone in my home, save for the housekeeper. During the stormy part of the year I was practically a prisoner. However much one might have wished to do this or that outside, the way was blocked. One had the absolution of the snow for any failure to discharge pastoral duties. In this manner I had a day extending from eight in the morning till twelve at night when I could practically do exactly as I liked.

'I was barely twenty-three at that time, and I found that I had accepted much on the testimony of men I looked up to. It grew clearer and clearer to me that it would be wise to test my creed—religious, literary, and political. I resolved that some hours of every day—the last hours—should be spent in serious grappling with great books. Accordingly I set out on this path. My beginning was with the *Ethics* of Spinoza. On that subject I had gained a college prize, but I knew that I had completely failed to grasp the significance of Spinoza's system. There followed a long, sustained, and deliberate attempt to understand what Pantheism really implies, and, in particular, whether it allows any place to the validity of moral distinctions. Without claiming for one moment to have solved the pro-

[1] From the *Dufftown News and Speyside Advertiser*, August 12, 1925.

blem, I may say with some confidence that the mental discipline was useful, and it made me read everything about Pantheism that I could buy or borrow. Then came Calvin's *Institutes*. We were taught Calvinism in the Divinity College, but few attempted to read the great divine in his own works. He was not half so fascinating as Spinoza, and yet a long and serious effort to understand the great system which Calvin built up cannot fail to leave an indelible trace on the mind. I had also bought the Commentaries of Bishop Lightfoot, so far as they were then published, and I read those with most minute care over and over again, making innumerable notes. The books that occupied me during these winters very soon gave me great pleasure, so that I looked forward to my evening wrestle with the masters as the happiest time of the day. Sometimes I grew so excited that I could not get to sleep for an hour or two. Another book may be mentioned, Mansel's *Limits of Religious Thought*, a book that roused Maurice and Hutton to passionate indignation. But it convinced me at the time ; and I am inclined to think, with great deference, that Mansel was most seriously misunderstood, and that he was essentially a defender and not a destroyer of the faith. Then in a sale at Dufftown I secured Beaumont and Fletcher in eight volumes for a mere song, and read through the plays with the greatest care. I am fully persuaded that my self-education in the Dufftown manse, amidst the absolving snow, had an immense influence over me, which continues to this day.

'I always look back with pleasure to my three months each winter there, when I was a prisoner alone with my cat and my books. I always think I did more good to myself then than I have ever been able to do since.' [1]

While at Rayne he had begun to contribute reviews to the *Academy* and to the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, then edited by Dr. Oswald Dykes. At Dufftown he went on writing regularly each week for the *Aberdeen Journal*. To correspondents in 1875 and

[1] Letter to the Rev. W. M'Robbie, in 1893.

1876 he says : ' Yesterday I spent six hours in house-to-house visitations in the village. To-day I have been writing a notice of a Commentary on Luke for the *Free Press* and of the magazines for the *Journal*.' . . . ' I am trying to be made Scotch correspondent for the *Christian World*.' But ' the *Christian World* would not take a Scotch letter, on the ground that Scotch people were so clannish that they would not read the paper, and English people didn't care.' Nicoll also contributed a series of evangelistic addresses to the *Christian*, and these formed the basis of his first book, ' Calls to Christ,' published by Messrs. Morgan & Scott in March 1877. This little volume received high praise from such preachers as C. H. Spurgeon, Joseph Parker, and Henry Drummond ; Parker described it as a model of Christian expostulation and pleading.

Yet in spite of such unremitting industry, the young minister could not altogether escape the penalties and perils of his solitude. ' Every now and then I would fall for two or three hours into a mood of black depression. There was nothing to justify any kind of gloom. Yet the cloud descended and took its own time to pass away. Looking back, I attribute this to the lack of human intercourse with men who shared my thoughts and experience. . . . In those days I wrote and received many letters. But they do not quite make up for the loss of the living presence, the hearty laughter, the brisk, conscious, vigorous life of congenial companionship. The depression that comes out of loneliness can be fought with and overcome in the most solitary place. But it is a danger, and it is a real danger.'

Nevertheless he had his compensations and consolations as well. For instance, he wrote : ' I found myself beginning to be much impressed by nature. In particular I was much affected by scenery. From three or four heights about Dufftown you get views of the loveliest kind. There was a little hill near my house which I climbed often about ten o'clock on a clear night to survey the scene and think over matters. When I had anything of importance to decide I took

it up to that little hill and thought over it till I had come to a decision.'

One decision arrived at on the little hill was to refuse an offer of the vacant pulpit of Chalmers Presbyterian Church, Adelaide. Nicoll himself had felt inclined to go, but his father would not hear of such an emigration.

## CHAPTER IV

### AT KELSO

During his stay of nearly three years at Dufftown his reputation widened, and Nicoll had many opportunities to preach in the south. In August 1877 he accepted a unanimous invitation to become minister of the Free Church at Kelso. This picturesque Border town, with its grey ruined Abbey, stands among lovely surroundings where the river Teviot joins the river Tweed. Sir Walter Scott, who spent part of his childhood there, pronounced it 'the most beautiful, if not the most romantic, village in Scotland.' Since that time Kelso had expanded until it now possessed 5000 inhabitants and no fewer than ten places of worship. The Free Church stood conspicuous with its spire. Dr. Horatius Bonar, whose hymns are sung wherever English is spoken, ministered in Kelso for nearly thirty years, and the influence of his noble personality lingered long after his departure. To the pulpit which Bonar had once filled Nicoll was inducted in September 1877, and a crowded social meeting bade him welcome. The Rev. Harry Nicoll appeared on the platform—though he characteristically disapproved of the removal from Dufftown, where he considered his son might have lived on in quiet happiness, with abundance of time for study and few distractions from the outside world.

But at Kelso the new minister rose to his larger responsibilities and opportunities. The freshness, originality, and charm of his preaching came as a revelation to the people. By temperament and habit Nicoll was an extempore speaker. He prepared very careful notes, with definite divisions and sub-divisions of the subject; but hardly one of his sermons was fully

written out. His vigorous thought and lucid arrangement, together with his wealth of felicitous and fluent language, made up for any defects of voice or delivery in a preacher who was so unmistakably sincere. By sermons and lectures and Bible-class addresses, into which he put his whole heart, he exercised a penetrating influence and gained unusual power over young men and women, while he also became a focus of the literary interest in the neighbourhood. His fame spread, so that his congregation heard of their minister in the pulpit of Free St. George's, Edinburgh, or of the City Temple, London,[1] or conducting services in the *Salle Évangélique* at the Paris Exhibition of 1878. Kelso, which lies within easy reach of the Scottish capital, proved a wholesome change from the isolation of Dufftown. One recollection, however, sounds oddly archaic to-day : 'I saw a good deal of Edinburgh Presbyterians during my time at Kelso, and was very much struck by their censoriousness. The first time I ever preached in Edinburgh, when I was little more than a boy, I introduced a quotation from Shakespeare. The minister of the church, an exceedingly kind and friendly man, wrote to me afterwards that my using Shakespeare's name in the pulpit had given great offence, and he counselled me never to do it again but to make quotations without naming the author.' [2]

Nicoll had brought his sister Maria to act as housekeeper in his new home. This clever, practical, genial lady possessed a vivid mind with a keen sense of humour, and her delightful personality added charm to the manse. Her brother used to say that without exception she was the wittiest woman he had ever known.[3] But a momentous revolution in the minister's

[1] In a letter to Mrs. Dunlop he confessed : 'In the evening the City Temple was quite packed. I felt what I never felt before—actually terrified at my audience. When they all rose up to sing, it was an overpowering sight.'

[2] Letter from W. R. Nicoll to Miss M'Laren, October 13, 1917.

[3] Miss Maria Nicoll afterwards married Mr. Peter Logan, an influential elder in her brother's congregation at Kelso. One of their sons, the Rev. Innes Logan, is minister of St. Columba's Presbyterian Church, Cambridge.

life was impending. Eleven months after he settled at Kelso the local papers announced his marriage : ' At 6 Melville Street, Edinburgh, on August 21, 1878, by the Rev. H. Nicoll, M.A., Auchindoir, assisted by the Rev. A. M. Craig, M.A., Sprouston, the Rev. W. R. Nicoll, M.A., Free Church, Kelso, to Isa, only child of the late Peter Dunlop, Esq., Skaithmuir, Berwickshire.' The young bride was only twenty. Her father, a prosperous farmer in the Border country, near Coldstream, died when she was too young to recollect him. She had lived from early childhood with her widowed mother at Kelso, where she was admired for her fine musical gifts and beloved for her sympathy with the poor and suffering and her rare sweetness of disposition. It proved a singularly happy marriage, crowned in due course by a daughter and a son—both born in the cosy, southward-facing manse, ' where purple clematis clustered round the porch and fruit ripened on the sunny garden wall.'

During his Kelso ministry Gladstone's famous Midlothian campaigns took place in 1879-80. Many years afterwards Nicoll wrote : ' If I had not heard Gladstone in Midlothian I should have lived and died without the faintest conception of what human speech can do. At that time Gladstone simply maddened his audiences. He welded them into a unity, wild with passion, ready to follow him even to the death.'

From ecclesiastical disputes Nicoll held aloof as yet, although in Scotland latterly these had grown fierce and bitter. In 1876, Robertson Smith, who was Professor of Hebrew in the Free Church College, Aberdeen, published in the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* an elaborate article on the Bible. This was written from the point of view of the Higher Criticism, and practically accepted the Graf-Wellhausen theory as to the documents of the Pentateuch. Such conclusions startled and shocked the mass of Scottish Presbyterians, who woke up to find their traditional beliefs about the Scriptures suddenly challenged by one of their own accredited teachers. A storm arose which, after nearly half a century, it is difficult to

realise, or even to estimate with fairness. For several years in succession the Robertson Smith controversy convulsed the Free Church. We need not attempt to follow in detail these old, unhappy, far-off things, or to disentangle fights fought long ago from the intricate ecclesiastical procedure by which they were complicated. The situation grew acute when the brilliant professor published other articles, defending and reaffirming his position. At the Free Church Assembly in 1879 Nicoll voted for Dr. Rainy's motion, which refused to suspend Smith but appointed a committee to confer with him : this was lost by a single vote. Finally matters came to a climax at the Assembly in May 1881, when, on another motion of Rainy's, Smith was practically deposed by a large majority. Nicoll again endorsed Rainy's action, which sacrificed the professor in a desire to secure both unity and at the same time critical liberty within the Free Church. That end was accomplished indeed, but at a heavy cost. Robertson Smith became 'not only the protagonist but also the martyr of Biblical criticism.' In after life he found a hospitable and happy asylum at Cambridge, and increased his own European reputation for learning. But he could never pardon those who had voted against him—even those who, like Nicoll, sympathized with his main contentions and had unbounded reverence for his astonishing powers.

Thirty years afterwards Nicoll made frank confession [1] 'that Rainy and the Free Church erred most deplorably and most tragically in their treatment of Smith.'

During Nicoll's ministry at Kelso he made several holiday journeys to the Continent, visiting Denmark and Sweden in one year, Bohemia in another, and Cracow and Warsaw in a third. As early as 1875 he had made acquaintance with Kuenen, the great Hebraist, at Leyden, 'which I love best of all the

[1] In his leader in the *British Weekly* of May 23, 1912, upon Robertson Smith's Life, by J. S. Black and G. Chrystal.

The fact was that Rainy and Smith were incompatibles, and neither could appreciate the other's point of view. This is brought out by the Rev. A. Fawkes, in the *Edinburgh Review* for July 1912.

Dutch towns.' In July 1881 he travelled to Leipzig, where he met the venerable Franz Delitzsch—'a little old man, very enthusiastic, I got on with him splendidly'—and also spent two or three days at Greifswald with a German friend, in order to see Wellhausen. This latter visit is minutely described in the following letter, dated only a few weeks after Robertson Smith had been deposed.

*To his Wife*

DEUTSCHES HAUS, GREIFSWALD, POMERANIA,
*Wednesday, Aug.* 3, 1881.

I wrote you from Warnemunde on Sunday. On Monday night we went to Rostock and slept in a huge old-fashioned hotel. Then at 6.15 A.M. on Tuesday we left for Greifswald. The distance is not very great, but the journey is tedious, as they stop at every station long enough to have some beer. Greifswald is a quaint town, with some Gothic houses and a huge plain church. We came to this hotel, the best in the place, and dined. We saw a good many students with gashes in their faces, got in duels. Then we went out to see Dr. Wellhausen.

He lives in a flat, the third story of a large house. We were most cordially received, and enjoyed him immensely. He immediately produced cigars and wine (I have smoked a great deal here) and we sat talking for about an hour in his library. It is a large plain room with very few books, and those mainly texts of the Bible, in Hebrew, Syriac, etc. The only English books I saw were Colenso on the Pentateuch, Palgrave's *Arabia*, and Wright on Zechariah. When we rose to go, he said he had plenty of time, and would like to spend the evening with us. He would have asked us to stay with him for the night, but his wife had been ill ; they have no children. Accordingly we went out with him and had a delightful evening in the open air.

He is a stout man, rather little, with a round face, a darkish moustache and beard, and a frank bold manner. He speaks English tolerably, and what

with his English and my German we got along very comfortably. We walked out to a ruined monastery by the sea, sat down and drank some beer, and were so engrossed in talk that we lost the steamer back and walked home, which did not matter much. It was very pleasant, and I shall not forget that bright August night sitting by the sea, looking over to the beautiful island of Rügen. I note down some things that he said—not that they will interest you much, but because I wish to keep them for future use.

We spoke of Robertson Smith. I said that Smith held the Bible to be inspired and historically true, along with Wellhausen's views, and that he also held to the truth of miracles. W. shook his head, and said that, while he did not deny that miracles were possible, there was no historical proof for them and that Smith's position was *sehr sonderbar*, but he had no reason to suspect his good faith. I asked him what he thought of the testimony of Christ. He replied that no doubt Christ was mistaken about the Old Testament, but that as He did not understand about the earth and the sun so He did not about the Bible, and it mattered little. I said that the natural effect of such views was to shake the place of the Bible in people's minds, to which he replied that he was pressed by this difficulty—that he did not see any way out of it—that he was angry at Stade, of Giessen, for preaching his (W.'s) theories as gospel—that the people in Germany were neither orthodox nor heterodox, caring nothing about it—that the students of theology were of a lower class, but orthodox—and that they were trying in Berlin to vaccinate people with religion through the Court preacher, but it would not do. Smith, he said, was not a scholar, but clever at presenting other men's theories: scholars were often stupid, but Smith was not stupid at all. Smith has employed W. to write an article on the History of Israel for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which will appear soon: it reaches to thirty pages.

Wellhausen considers that there are five first-class Hebraists in Germany—Dillmann, Gildemeister,

Bickell, Nöldeke, and Lagarde. Bickell is not a Catholic at heart—a poor scholar. Lagarde is a great scholar and a great fool—very jealous of his priority. Smend's Commentary on Ezekiel is not an excellent book. Duhm is very inaccurate. The first part of Colenso on the Pentateuch is important, the rest not. Kuenen is the first of living Hebraists, and a very good, simple, straightforward man ; he has not many students, as in Holland the common people are orthodox. Kuenen is greatly perplexed by Smith—does not know what to think of him—and also by Cheyne.

Wellhausen says that 'interpolations' are the weak side of every theory ; that nothing more can be reached than probability, but that his theory of the Priestly Codex is equal in certainty to [the theory of] the Deutero-Isaiah. He has not read Delitzsch and Hoffmann—rarely reads any criticisms on himself. He prefers old writers to new, as more solid. Gesenius is the best commentary on Isaiah, Vitringa also very good. Spencer on Hebrew Laws is excellent. Has read Poole's articles in the *Contemporary Review*, but does not think them of any importance, because the Egyptologists have no chronology at all. Rougé is the best Egyptologist, much better than the Germans. Many heterodox books are unscientific, as well as orthodox books.

Wellhausen thinks Hengstenberg is very able, but an advocate. Keil not very able, but knows something—an advocate. Delitzsch not an advocate and a good scholar, but has no method. W. hates Jews. Steinthal explains Samson by the fact that, when the sun enters the [zodiacal sign of the] Lion, bees make honey ! Absurd. He has read [Matthew] Arnold, but makes nothing of him. When he wants amusement, he reads Sam Weller !

Wellhausen does not think that there was ever such a person as Aaron—perhaps there was a Moses, but this is doubtful. It is not possible to save the good faith of the Chronicler, or to defend the historicity of Daniel. Isaiah or Amos never would have

done as the writer of the Priestly Codex did. W. is tired of the Old Testament, which is not popular in Germany, and is now turning his mind to studying Arabic. He will not publish the second edition of his book [1] for five years, 'and when I die in the meantime it matters not.' He does not like disputation, and bears no malice to any one.

Wellhausen considers that no Dutchman knows Hebrew, except Kuenen; Oort does not. He has been in London, copying an Arabic MS. in the British Museum; he saw nothing of London but the Museum. Never goes from home. Studies from seven in the morning to noon, every day. Cannot study at night. Admires Gibbon much, because he goes to the *fontes*. Thinks that there is much practical religion in Scotland, which is better than learning. Hopes there may be internal religion in Germany, but doubts it. Reads much in Carlyle—admires him exceedingly. Thinks Smith may be right about the 51st Psalm—has had similar thoughts about it.

His students say that Wellhausen can repeat the whole Hebrew Bible. He was born at Hanover, and is now about thirty-seven.[2]

At Kelso, Nicoll's omnivorous reading continued, while his literary activities increased. His study contained a rapidly growing library. A friend who often stayed at the manse describes how every post brought papers, journals, magazines from far and near; at once their wrappers were torn off, their pages read with rapid glances, and they were thrown aside. Literary news and religious, ecclesiastical, personal notes specially attracted him, though his primary concern was with literature in its relation to Christianity and the Church. In 1879 he became literary

[1] Wellhausen's *Geschichte Israels*. The second edition, however, appeared, under the title *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, in 1883.

[2] On the occasion of Wellhausen's seventieth birthday, Nicoll recalled this visit to Greifswald: 'Wellhausen then had as colleague Cremer, the New Testament lexicographer. Cremer, who differed very much from Wellhausen in theological opinions, said to me: "But he is one of the greatest geniuses in the world, and a most noble, simple, open-hearted man."' See 'Rambling Remarks' in the *British Weekly* of July 9, 1914.

adviser to Messrs. Macniven & Wallace, a firm of Edinburgh publishers. He projected their *Household Library of Exposition*—a successful series of compact volumes by religious teachers such as Dr. Alexander Maclaren, Dr. Joseph Parker, Dr. Marcus Dods, Dr. Marshall Lang, Dr. Donald Fraser, and Dr. A. B. Bruce. The series included Nicoll's own book, 'The Lamb of God,' in which he drew out the meaning of that title as applied to Christ in the writings of St. John; the preface is dated Kelso, 1883.

Already he had published 'The Incarnate Saviour: A Life of Jesus Christ,' the chapters of which had been written in winter evenings at Dufftown, then preached at Kelso, and then revised and issued as a volume in 1881.[1] From Kelso Nicoll also sent to press his first series of 'Songs of Rest'—a beautiful little anthology of religious poems,[2] selected and arranged with rare taste and skill, which gained wide popularity.

In 1881 Messrs. Macniven & Wallace published 'Alfred Tennyson: His Life and Works,' by Walter E. Wace. Under this pseudonym Nicoll brought together 'by far the fullest collection of personal facts regarding Mr. Tennyson and his works' that had hitherto been published. The facts were gathered with great labour from many sources, public and private, and included the results of a visit paid to Horncastle and Somersby to glean local memories and traditions of the poet and his family. One chapter traces parallels between Tennyson and earlier authors, and the volume concludes with a bibliography. Nicoll records that the book 'had the high compliment of being referred to by Francis Turner Palgrave in [his article on Tennyson in] *Chambers's Encyclopaedia* [1892]. That is enough to show that Tennyson was pleased with it.'

During the years when he was producing these volumes it must be remembered that Nicoll also had the sole charge of a congregation with over 400 com-

[1] This striking book won warm admiration from Canon Liddon, and has been translated into Japanese and Chinese.

[2] These included his own verses 'Born Blind,' and a poem 'For of such is the Kingdom,' by his gifted sister Eliza Nicoll, who had died in 1873 at the age of eighteen.

municant members. He frequently contributed to a Glasgow weekly, the *Christian Leader*, whose editor, the Rev. W. Howie Wylie, wrote on January 3, 1883: 'Though I have no claim at all upon your kindness, you have really been more helpful to me than any other person in the world, and I have to thank you with all my heart.' Six weeks later Nicoll wrote to his father: 'I have been overwhelmed with work. On Monday I preached at Gordon; on Tuesday I lectured in the Town Hall here on Ireland; on Wednesday I have my prayer meeting; to-morrow I lecture at Crailing; on Friday I preach in Edinburgh, and on Sunday at St. Andrews. After that I shall be quieter.'

While at Kelso he also became associated with Messrs. Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., a firm of London publishers, for whom he projected and edited *The Contemporary Pulpit*, a sixpenny monthly homiletic magazine, which first appeared in January 1884 and lived for ten years.

In 1884 Nicoll began his connexion, which was to prove so fruitful and enduring, with Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton. He proposed to edit for them a series of volumes, to be entitled *The Clerical Library*, which they at once undertook to publish and which speedily attained success. Before long Mr. Stoughton paid a visit to Kelso and spent a day or two at the manse to consult with Nicoll regarding their monthly theological magazine, the *Expositor*. This had been edited, since its foundation in 1875, by Dr. Samuel Cox, of Nottingham, himself a gifted expositor and skilled Hebraist. Latterly, however, the proprietors realized that Dr. Cox's personal views on eschatology and inspiration offended and alarmed a section of his readers, who included clergy and ministers of all Churches. The firm had decided on a change of editorship, and they finally offered this post to Nicoll. After several weeks' deliberation he agreed, and took control of the *Expositor* from January 1885,[1] down to his death in 1923.

[1] In a letter, dated September 4, 1885, Nicoll says: 'The success of the *Expositor* has been great, and I have had a great deal of pleasure about it, but the correspondence involved has been awful.'

Writing little himself, he succeeded in securing contributions from nearly all the leading Biblical scholars in the country, as well from distinguished experts in America and on the Continent. Month by month through all those long years the magazine continued to present 'the best thoughts of the best men on the best of books.'

It is pleasant to read the following letter to Nicoll from Dr. Samuel Cox :—

HOLME, HASTINGS, *Dec.* 10, 1889.

> Some months ago you wrote to me in very generous terms asking me to contribute to the magazine you now edit. In reply I could only assure you that I entertain no grudge against you, my successor but not my supplanter, nor against Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, since they were as much bound to be true to their conscience as I to mine ; but that it was impossible for me to suppress my convictions in anything I wrote. I was sorry I could not send you a more gracious response to your kindly advances. . . . Well, I am getting an old man and my health is breaking fast, and I should be sorry to carry even the *semblance* of a grudge with me to the grave. And so I will send you these papers, which were not written for you, or indeed for any one save a few friends, provided you care to have them, in order that, if you wish to use them, and we can come to terms, you may insert them in the *Expositor*.

The two articles enclosed by Dr. Cox appeared in the *Expositor* for 1890.

Every day in Nicoll's eight years at Kelso was crowded with ministerial and literary labours. In after life he used to say, 'I can only claim that I am one of the most industrious creatures God ever made.' He seemed literally tireless—always reading, always thinking, always planning some fresh enterprise. Yet as early as 1882 he had to confess : 'I am far from well. I really cannot answer the continual drafts that are made upon me. These burdens are more than I can bear.'

# CHAPTER V

## ORDERED SOUTH

The year 1885 was perhaps the darkest in Nicoll's life. At the Kelso manse in January his younger brother Henry [1] died of tuberculosis, carried off at the age of twenty-six by the same malady which had proved fatal to his mother and his sister. The aged father travelled down from Lumsden in the dead of winter to bid his son farewell.

Nicoll, accompanied by his friend, the Rev. Alexander Rust, set out in the following June for a holiday in Norway. At Christiania he caught the seeds of typhoid in a badly-drained hotel, and returned to lie dangerously ill for several weeks at Kelso. His recovery was slow and difficult. In the autumn he began to preach again; but before long pleurisy supervened, and the Edinburgh specialists who were consulted gave a very grave report. He had always suffered from weakness in one lung, and now there seemed too much reason to fear that the haunting disease of his family had marked him also for a victim. The following letters written to the Rev. W. M'Robbie describe and explain his condition and its sequel.

Kelso, *Dec.* 15, 1885.

You may have heard about the serious position I am now placed in. After reaching home I was

[1] Henry J. Nicoll (1858-85) a young man of high promise, had gained various prizes at Aberdeen University, and after a brief course of medical study devoted himself to journalism and literature. His vigorous intellect and lucid masculine style, together with his intimate knowledge of his father's library, qualified him for the staff of the *Aberdeen Free Press*, and before his death he became editor of its *Evening Gazette*. He published several books, including a successful short 'Life of Carlyle,' and his 'Landmarks in English Literature' won high commendation. The two brothers had planned an elaborate joint work on English Literature in the Victorian Age.

seized with pleurisy. I was brought to the very lowest state of weakness and prostration, and on getting better the doctor said that, all things considered, he thought I should give up public speaking for a long time, say two or three years. I went into Edinburgh when I was able, and consulted the two leading men on the lungs, Dr. Affleck and Sir Thomas Grainger Stewart. The former most strongly agreed ; the latter said, ' Come back in a fortnight.' So I went on Friday, and he said he had not a shadow of doubt that it was my duty to resign, and he took full responsibility.

Last Sunday I read the doctors' letters to my office-bearers and said we would discuss the matter afterwards. Of course I am driven out of my place, for it would be suicide to remain. But we must bow to the wiser Will.

All say that I am not in danger now, and after two or three years' rest may resume pulpit work. Meanwhile we have no plans, save that we are to take a house in London to be a home, and I shall take rest abroad probably for a year, continuing my present editorial work but not in the meantime adding to it. I know you will feel much for me in this, and that you will not expect me to say more.

KELSO, *Jan.* 2, 1886.

I would have written sooner, but have had a kind of relapse and have been mostly in bed. Now I am better, but very feeble. We thought over every plan to avoid my severing from the Church, but could see nothing. Two years' leave of absence, after six months', would have been too much ; but I believe they would have forced it on me had not the medical opinion been that, if I am ever to return to ministerial work, it must be where the acoustics are easy and where meetings that involve night-journeys are unnecessary.

The fact is I am in a pretty serious condition. So far the trouble has not advanced to a point from which it cannot retreat. But it easily might, and

this is my one chance. The doctors would like me to give up literary work also for a time. I am most reluctant to do this, and will not unless I be fit for nothing. Should I get back my health I have no doubt of getting as much work as I am fit to do, and I want to free myself as far as I can from any burden of responsibility. I have not been idle while I had the power to work. I had for six months of last year the tremendous labour of organizing the *Expositor* from the bottom, and often wrote thirty letters a day. If you ever have typhoid, as I pray you may not, you may find that you are not very fit for correspondence. I see no one, being forbidden to converse much. But I have had many touching proofs of kindness and, what is better, that my ministry here has been more useful than I thought it was.

We hope to get away about January 12, to Dawlish in Devon. . . . You must come and see us, if we ever have a home again.

An old friend at Kelso writes : ' Before Nicoll left he was really very ill indeed—so ill that he went away without saying good-bye to his congregation. No one who saw him then could wonder at this. It would not have surprised me if we had heard of his early demise. One felt he was scarcely fit to undertake the journey to London.'

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

DAWLISH, *Feb.* 27, 1886.

I had to leave Kelso very suddenly as I was perceptibly getting worse ; thus I did not attend any of the meetings of Presbytery, and I was forbidden to attempt a farewell sermon. I have not definitely improved, but I am no worse and there is every hope that with prolonged rest I may get quite over this dangerous turn. But it will be at least a year before I can undertake even any additional literary work. Until the weakness has passed away, public speaking is not to be thought of. I believe it has just been taken in time.

This is a pretty little town, not unlike Kelso, about twelve miles from Torquay, with the same climate, but much quieter. The weather has sometimes been cold, but it seems to have been better than anywhere else that I read of. Practically there has been no snow. I vary much with the weather, and feel much better when it is sunshine. Yesterday we had a splendid day of sunshine and great warmth, and I see in Scotland it was a fearful day : in Edinburgh showers of snow all the time. Still the people here say it is their worst winter since 1881. We take a walk when the weather is good, and of course I have always a certain amount of work with my editing, and I read more or less, and the day goes past quickly enough. Sundays are the worst. Dissent here is nowhere. The Wesleyan, Congregational, and Primitive Methodist bodies are represented, and the first two have fine chapels, but the united congregation of the three is not 200. The ministers get about £80 a year, and are quite uneducated. The Church of England has it all its own way : two fine full churches, but the preaching is nothing and I dislike the service very much. Still, if I had to stay here I should be forced to go to the English Church. No educated man could stand the Dissenters.

I do not much miss preaching, but that is because I feel so unequal to it.

As you say, the people at Kelso were very kind—more than kind. I am very anxious that they should get settled soon, but am not interfering. I will send you a copy of a farewell letter I sent them.

We left our furniture in the manse and our children with their grandmother. Of course that cannot last, and we mean to go up to London on Wednesday to look for a house, so that we may get settled by mid-summer. We have no idea as yet where we may settle, but it will likely be a good way out of town, perhaps about the Crystal Palace. I look forward with much dread to the taking of the house, but it may be easier than we think. It is a great trial to

be without a home.[1] Mrs. Nicoll has been much better of this change. She was very much exhausted by my long and dangerous illnesses. But she is now anxious to have the children again : they are both very well.

Looking back, many years afterwards, at that time of prostration and suspense, Nicoll wrote : 'It was a dreadful, dark winter, when there seemed little hope of my pulling through.' The note of personal experience rings through an article he published in 1887 : 'Spitting a little blood, that may change for us the face of earth and sky. The remote horizon of seventy is replaced by near and nearing walls. . . . To realize that one is fallen out of the race when as yet hardly in it—to feel the shadow of the prison house upon us in youth—that is hard. . . . The ambition is to be fearless and gentle under the condemnation, to accept the sentence silently, to look for the stars that come out when the sun is down and the west faded. . . . It is not altogether ill with the invalid after all.'[2]

Notwithstanding his weakness Nicoll's eager, busy brain worked on. The following letter to Dr. Marcus Dods was written from Dawlish in February 1886 :

I do not think [Principal] Tulloch's book[3] is of any value. The tone is good, and there are some acute criticisms. In facts it contains many small and two or three very gross blunders. I expected that, but I hoped it would give some help in the difficult but indispensable work of finding the nexus between movements. There is none ; he is as stupid as S——. Our little island is split into planets, with a brace of theologians on each. Thus,

[1] Writing to Dr. Marcus Dods the same month, Nicoll says : 'I feel rather lonely and depressed here away from my books, which I was enjoying intensely when I had to leave.'

[2] Leading article entitled 'Ordered South,' in the *British Weekly*, December 30, 1887.

[3] The book in question, 'Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century,' had been published in 1885. Principal Tulloch was staying that same winter at Torquay, where he died in February 1886.

theology is just whatever people happen to be thinking.

Tulloch's account of the Oxford Movement is a mass of confusion ; but there is no way of understanding that, except by working through the pamphlets and theological periodicals of the time. The only useful book is the *Apologia*, and that is meagre though singularly accurate. It is most lamentable that it is now impossible to recover the authorship of review articles.

On some points, when you have leisure, I should like to compare notes. Thus : on Carlyle's religious teaching—

(*a*) How did Carlyle become so complete a sceptic ? I never saw this question put or answered, but surely it is of some importance. My answer is : various causes, but by far the chief, his scientific studies under Leslie and Playfair, both thorough sceptics though Playfair was in Orders. It is clear he struck first against miracles, and he was too wise not to see that all is involved in that.

(*b*) What was his ' conversion,' achieved through Goethe ? This : the perceiving that Duty would stand when the great props of God and Immortality had been taken away. Thus life, motive, and labour remained.

(*c*) Was Carlyle designedly reticent as to religion in his works, and if so with what motive ? It is ridiculous to deny that he was reticent. Where is there anything in his works like his letter on Prayer ? Why ? Not from fear, but because he saw that religion and Christian ideas were great buttresses of Duty and would not weaken it by weakening them. Of course he lost his temper with that insufferable specimen of the clerical prig, Julius Hare—but what then ?

(*d*) To what extent did Carlyle believe in God and Immortality ? There was this in favour of the ideas, that they had been dear and helpful to the most loyal servants of Duty, and it was pleasant to think they might be true. No more.

Any just estimate of Thomas Erskine, A. J. Scott, Ewing, M'Leod Campbell, will surely rate their general endowment and intellectual strength much lower than is now the way. Had Erskine not been a laird—look down the vista! None had any imagination: A. J. Scott neither emotion nor imagination. As to Ewing, one is tempted to apply Macaulay on Laud. But however that may be—when you are told he was a leader of thought, appeal to facts in Mr. Strahan's publishing books. He cost Strahan's creditors as much as most men. I mean, he had no vogue. Concrete statements are useful at times: it is as well to know that Maurice's best sermons in St. Peter's, Vere Street, were delivered to an average of 100 listeners. So Stopford Brooke's account of F. W. Robertson's success in Brighton is demonstrably false—but enough of that.

The following letter to the Rev. W. M'Robbie announces Nicoll's settlement in a new home:

Glenroy, Highland Road,
Upper Norwood, *March* 21, 1886.

After a good deal of hunting we have taken this house for three years. The place is within five minutes' walk of the Crystal Palace. I have always preferred this suburb: it is so high, with so much open country and such splendid views, and the air is the purest and most bracing in London. We are seven miles from the heart of the city and three miles from Croydon. We are within five minutes' walk of two railway stations which convey everywhere. Spurgeon's grand house is quite near, and there seem to be many Scotch people. There is a Presbyterian Church, the minister of which is Taylor.[1] We have a Baptist Chapel at the top of our road, of which the minister is the Rev. S. A. Tipple, who

[1] This Church, which Nicoll joined during his residence in Norwood, numbered among its elders the Rev. Dr. William Wright, a man of much personal charm, for many years Editorial Superintendent of the Bible Society, who with his family became lifelong friends of the household at Glenroy.

has published some books of sermons. He is a venerable old man, and we like his preaching very much.[1]

I was thrown back by a bad cold—otherwise I think there is an improvement, and the chest pains are not so bad. I now feel pretty sure I shall get over this danger. But from all the doctors say, I have no expectation of being ever able to preach more than once a day—so I must turn my mind to editorial work, in which I think I may be as useful as I could ever have been in any other way, if strength be granted.

I have had much encouragement from Hodder & Stoughton. They were anxious I should undertake additional editorial work, which would have raised my income and to which if in good health I should be perfectly equal. But I thought it wise to take a year's comparative rest. As it is, what I have from them, with our own, is ample for all our needs, and I may have to go abroad for part of the winter. I am looking forward, however, to editing a paper which will serve the cause of the Free Churches in this country in these difficult days—the said cause being, I believe more than ever, the cause of Christ.

Nicoll spent several weeks of May and June in the Engadine. There his health greatly improved, and he could write in gay spirits to Dr. Marcus Dods :

PONTRESINA, *May* 18, 1886.

Very few visitors have come as yet, and I have all the hotel to myself. We are very busy, however. The hotel-keeper's daughter, Miss Gredig, and her younger brother are both to be married on June 5, —she to a manufacturer in Stuttgart—he to a girl in Samaden. The manufacturer seems a very decent man, and the poor Samaden girl is to manage

[1] This devout and rarely gifted preacher ministered at Upper Norwood Baptist Chapel for nearly half a century. He figures as 'the Rev. Eli Julius' in Claudius Clear's earlier correspondence. See the *British Weekly*, February 3, 1888. Elsewhere Nicoll wrote: 'Mr. Tipple is like a conjuror—the text, the hat; the sermon, eggs, birds, and flowers.'

the hotel. For the old people a new house is being built up the road. I have been engaged the best part of two days in writing letters for Miss Gredig to her numerous English friends announcing the event, and in hearing selections from the German's letters.

HOTEL STEINBOCK, CHUR, *June* 7, 1886.

At Pontresina I had a very good time, and scraped up acquaintance with most of the village. The marriages were a most special occasion, with nearly 200 guests. Miss Gredig, whom I took very much to, was not a very willing bride—there being another Romeo—but it will come all right : her husband is a fine manly fellow. The village parson was not employed. There is a general feeling against him, which rests on the sad fact that he is under his wife and Pares the Potatoes Publicly. Whether he should pare at all is moot ; but as to the publicity there is general unanimity and indignation. Yet still he Pares. So we had a stout pastor from Zurich, who made two speeches and drank five bottles of wine with much dignity and feeling.

On his return from Switzerland, Nicoll was able to send this hopeful account of himself to Dr. Marcus Dods :

NORWOOD, *June* 23, 1886.

I have been much troubled since coming home with pain in my lung, and went to Sir Andrew Clark on Monday. You will be glad to hear that his report was most reassuring. He differed entirely from Lauder Brunton [1] on some main points. He said the pain was purely muscular—that the lung was almost quite right—that by autumn I should be quite well again. He said I could take up as much editorial work as I liked—so long as it did not in-

[1] This eminent physician warned his patient that there was no chance for him if he stayed in England. Thereupon Nicoll promptly crossed the road and consulted Sir Andrew Clark, who lived in the same street and gave a very different opinion which proved correct. As the result of this experience Nicoll always insisted that his friends should refuse to accept an adverse report of any single specialist, without confirmation.

volve worry or night exposure. To public speaking —at least for a long time—he was altogether opposed. He did not think there would be any need for my going abroad in winter. I liked him better than any other doctor I have seen—he was so frank.

After this cheering verdict, Nicoll could take heart to venture on founding the *British Weekly*, and launching out in London on the world of letters in which he was to make for himself so individual and conspicuous a name. Six months earlier Dr. Dods had written prophetically of his illness : ' It may only turn out to be an irresistible Hand guiding you to work specially suited for you.'

Looking back many years later at his change of vocation, Nicoll wrote :[1] ' I had never contemplated a literary career. I had expected to go on as a minister, doing literary work in leisure times, but my fate was sealed for me. . . . I am not in a position to say whether or not I chose wisely in taking up journalism. The truth is, I had no choice at all. A minister thrown out of work by a failure of health is placed in a position of the greatest difficulty. As a rule, he has no qualifications for business. He may be able to teach, but teaching involves a drain on the strength which is as great as that of the pastorate. Practically the one thing open to him is literary work. I have never troubled to consider whether the work of the preacher or the work of the journalist is the more important. Much may be said on both sides. But it was never in any way an issue for me. It is surely right that a man should continue in the work that Providence has assigned to him so long as he can, and this was the course I took. When one door is closed to him, he has to consider whether another door will open. I am thankful that the door opened to me, and I can now perceive that the training and habits of former years helped me to enter it.'

[1] ' How I became a Journalist,' by W. R. Nicoll, in the *Home Messenger*, November 1909.

# CHAPTER VI

## RELIGIOUS JOURNALISM IN ENGLAND

The full history of modern English journalism has yet to be written. For its later development, however, the decisive events were the abolition of the Advertisement Tax in 1853, of the Newspaper Stamp Duty in 1855, and of the Paper Duty in 1861, followed by the passing of the Elementary Education Act in 1870. The first three of these reforms made cheap journals possible ; while the fourth created millions of readers by requiring that every child in the country should go to school. Gradually an immense new public grew up and began to demand new papers.

For many years, however, the old established journals pursued the even tenor of their way. Most London newspapers then were of a highly instructive kind. They contained long columns of leading articles, and although a day might be eventless the articles never failed to appear. Except in one or two cases, there was hardly any condescending to popular taste. In fact, editors and proprietors behaved like schoolmasters. They were possessed by the didactic spirit. They did not give readers what readers wished for, but what they ought to wish for—solid information and wholesome admonition. The editors and leader-writers themselves were often dignified and reserved persons, who cultivated aloofness as a sign of superior wisdom. They seldom came into touch with the young democracy, fresh from board schools and hungry for something attractive to read.

The earliest portent of a coming revolution showed itself in 1881, when George Newnes founded *Tit-Bits*, which in twelve months secured a weekly circulation of 300,000. Yet at the time when Nicoll came up to

London in 1886, hardly any one had realized what that portent implied. The Olympians of Fleet Street were to all appearance still solidly established on their thrones. The late Lord Burnham controlled the *Daily Telegraph*, with John Le Sage as its editor. W. H. Mudford was editing the *Standard*. On the *Daily News* Frank H. Hill had just given place to H. W. Lucy, who was succeeded a few months later by John R. Robinson. R. Whelan Boyle had charge of the *Daily Chronicle*. Frederick Greenwood was editing the *St. James's Gazette*, and Sir Algernon Borthwick the *Morning Post*. But at the helm of the *Pall Mall Gazette* John Morley had given place to W. T. Stead, seething with new ideas and fervid convictions. J. Passmore Edwards was editor and proprietor of the *Echo*. Norman Maccoll was editing the *Athenaeum*, with Theodore Watts-Dunton as his most brilliant contributor. F. C. Burnand was editor of *Punch*. Last, and not least, G. E. Buckle had been editor of the *Times* since February 1884.

But the spacious days of serene and dignified journalism were drawing near their close. The stately river flowed on, unaware of the cataracts lying in front. A new era of upheaval and transformation was at hand. Its arrival really dated from 1888, when Alfred Harmsworth issued the first number of *Answers to Correspondents*. The *Speaker* was born in 1890, and the *Westminster Gazette* in 1893 ; but it was when the *Daily Mail* appeared in 1896, followed by the *Daily Express* in 1900, that the fountains of the great deep in Fleet Street were broken up indeed.

For our purpose it will be convenient, and perhaps also illuminating, if we intercalate at this point some brief account of the religious press, as Nicoll found it when he ventured to begin the *British Weekly*.

In 1886 no other religious journal in the country had a circulation approaching that of the *Christian World*. It had been founded originally by the Rev. Jonathan Whittemore in 1857, but passed about two years later into the hands of James Clarke, whom Nicoll described as ' the greatest and most influential

of Nonconformist journalists.' He was a born editor. By rare ability, energy, and courage he made his penny weekly paper the popular organ of English Free Churchmen, who then laboured under bitter grievances and disabilities. Mr. Clarke enlisted gifted writers like Peter Bayne and William Howie Wylie, men with liberal sympathies and a broad outlook. For many years the *Christian World* wielded remarkable influence as a pioneer of progress both in politics and in theology. At one time it reached a circulation of something like 120,000.

In 1874 Dr. J. B. Paton, a true-hearted philanthropist but without editorial instinct, persuaded Mr. Samuel Morley, M.P., and others to assist him in founding the *Christian Signal*, a penny weekly journal which was intended to rival the *Christian World* on more orthodox lines. This ill-starred enterprise collapsed after a few months, though the warning of its fate remained.

Of a different calibre was the *Christian Age*, established in 1871 by John Lobb, who became a member of the London School Board. It gained considerable vogue by regular reports of sermons by T. De Witt Talmage, a striking American pulpit orator, whom it practically introduced to English readers.

Other more or less undenominational weeklies were the *Christian Globe*, founded in 1874; the *Christian Commonwealth*, founded in 1881; the *Christian Million*, founded in 1885. The *Christian Herald* (which originated in 1867 as *Signs of our Times*) appeared in 1876, and attained a great circulation under the editorship of the Rev. Michael Baxter, an interpreter of Biblical prophecies.

There was an obscure halfpenny weekly, founded in 1859, entitled *Revival*, which in 1870 Messrs. Morgan & Scott turned into the *Christian*, a penny weekly journal. Theologically this had much in common with the 'Open Brethren.' It gave prominence to evangelistic movements, and might be described as the organ of every one who preaches in a tent. During D. L. Moody's first visit to England the circulation of

the *Christian* more than doubled through its reports of his remarkable revival meetings.

In 1879 Messrs. Marshall Bros. brought out the *Life of Faith*, which had begun in 1874 as the *Christian's Pathway of Power*. Edited for many years by the Rev. Evan Hopkins, this weekly paper represented the type of spiritual teaching associated with the Keswick Convention.

The *Nonconformist*, which first appeared in 1841, was edited for nearly forty years by Edward Miall, who sat in the House of Commons for Rochdale and afterwards for Bradford. His journal represented 'the dissidence of Dissent and the protestantism of the Protestant religion,' and it protested vehemently against the disabilities which in those days still lay heavy upon Nonconformists. Like many radicals of the Manchester school, Edward Miall maintained that education, like religion, was no affair of the State. He printed in 1842 a series of articles on 'The Proper Sphere of Government' by Herbert Spencer. Even in its prosperous days the *Nonconformist* had to struggle for existence. It was never financially successful, and Miall used also to contribute to other journals. His younger brother, Charles E. Miall, afterwards became acting editor. J. G. Rogers at one time wrote leaders and then reviews; and later on, J. Allanson Picton wrote two leaders each week. Other contributors included Henry Richard, J. Carvell Williams, E. Lyulph Stanley (afterwards Lord Sheffield), W. Hale White, W. Nassau Senior, and Henry W. Lucy.

The *English Independent* had been first published in 1867 by James Clarke & Co., as a fourpenny weekly. At one time it drew much of its inspiration from J. G. Rogers, and was edited latterly by William Braden.

At the end of 1879 these two journals were amalgamated under C. E. Miall, and appeared from 1880 to the end of 1890 as the *Nonconformist and Independent*. In January 1891, this title was changed to the *Independent and Nonconformist*. It was conducted for two

years by F. Herbert Stead, and then came under the editorship of D. Burford Hooke, until in 1895 Arthur Porritt took editorial charge. In 1900 the paper was acquired by a group of Congregationalists, who carried it on as the *Examiner*, a weekly Congregational organ, edited by W. B. Selbie until 1909. The title was then again altered to the *British Congregationalist*, which was edited by Frank Johnson till 1912, then by Charles J. Hankinson, and then by Shirley J. Dickins. It flickered during the early months of the war, and went out in 1915.

The oldest Baptist weekly journal, the *Freeman*, had been originally founded in 1855 by the Rev. W. Heaton, a Baptist minister in Leeds. For a number of years Dr. Joseph Angus, Principal of Regent's Park College, was its nominal editor, while his main coadjutor was the Rev. W. Howie Wylie, who was at the same time an active and able member of the staff of the *Christian World*. Mr. Wylie afterwards removed to Glasgow, where he founded and edited the *Christian Leader*. He was succeeded on the *Freeman* by the Rev. Edward Leach, and then by the Rev. J. Hunt Cooke. In 1899-1900 the *Freeman* passed under the control of the Baptist Union, and appeared as the *Baptist Times and Freeman*, directed by the Rev. J. H. Shakespeare.

The *Baptist*, a weekly journal on more modern lines, published by its proprietor, Mr. Eliot Stock, had been established in 1872. For fourteen years it was edited by Mr. G. A. Hutchinson (who also founded and edited the *Boy's Own Paper* for the Religious Tract Society). In 1886, Mr. T. H. Stockwell became editor of the *Baptist* and twenty years later its proprietor, continuing his editorial charge of the paper until 1910, when it was acquired by the Baptist Union and amalgamated with the *Baptist Times and Freeman*. When the first Home Rule Bill in 1886 split the Liberal party, the *Baptist* took a strongly independent attitude, and secured a famous article on the question from the pen of Joseph Chamberlain, which was followed by a lengthy rejoinder in its columns from Mr. Gladstone, then Prime Minister.

The *Methodist Recorder* had been established in 1861 by a small group of Wesleyan ministers, the last survivor of whom, Charles Garrett, died in 1900. The original proprietors included the father of Sir H. H. Fowler, afterwards Viscount Wolverhampton, and the father of Sir Robert Perks. In 1886 the Rev. Nehemiah Curnock was made editor, in succession to Dr. W. T. Davison. The *Recorder* became the official organ of the Wesleyan Conference, with a wide and influential circulation.

The *Methodist Times*, a younger and sprightlier rival of the *Recorder*, had just been founded by the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes in 1885.

The *Spectator*, founded in 1828, was edited for nearly thirty years by Robert Stephen Rintoul, a fine specimen of educated Scottish radicalism and an able and impartial advocate of political reform. After his death in 1858 the *Spectator* came under the joint control of Mr. Meredith Townsend and Mr. Richard Holt Hutton. The partnership of these two great journalists raised the paper immensely not merely in circulation but in influence. Mr. Hutton, who had once tried without success to enter the Unitarian ministry, became an ardent disciple of F. D. Maurice, and in the columns of the *Spectator* he interpreted that subtle, devout, obscure theologian to the public. For many years the first 'middle' article in the paper was practically a weekly sermon from Mr. Hutton's pen.

In 1828, when Charles Simeon was still preaching at Cambridge, the *Record* was founded as an organ of Evangelical Churchmen. They had already achieved noble results in philanthropy and in Christian missions, and then formed the most energetic party in the English Church. In those days most journals were violent, and towards its ecclesiastical and theological opponents the *Record* adopted a tone of no small asperity. F. W. Robertson of Brighton suffered from it acutely, and to F. D. Maurice it was anathema.

At one time the *Record* had been issued bi-weekly. About 1880 it used to appear three times a week in broadsheet form, at 2½d. per copy. In March 1882

it first assumed its present weekly guise, at 4d. a copy, and in 1905 the price was reduced to 1d. From about 1854 to 1869 the *Record* was edited by Canon Garbitt. He was followed by the Rev. W. O. Purton, and later by the Rev. E. P. Cachemaille. In 1887 the Rev. A. R. Buckland became editor, till he was succeeded in 1908 by Mr. H. C. Hogan.

In October 1845, J. H. Newman joined the Roman Church. The first number of the *Guardian* appeared in January 1846—on the same day as the first issue of the *Daily News*. Among its promoters were Stafford Northcote and W. E. Gladstone. Lord Blachford (Frederick Rogers) has described the risk and difficulty of the undertaking : ' The idea was taken up by a knot to which I belonged—embracing J. B. Mozley and Thomas Haddan, together with R. W. Church and Montague Bernard, who were together responsible for what they could not secure in contributions and capital.' They had knowledge and style, but they were quite inexpert in the business management of a newspaper. For some time the *Guardian* was edited in a room over a baker's shop in Little Pulteney Street. Its mainstay was R. W. Church, who contributed a review and one or more political articles every week from 1846 until he became Dean of St. Paul's in 1871, and continued to write down to his death in 1890. By this means, in many anxious crises he virtually shaped the policy of the Church of England. The *Guardian* had as editor Martin Sharp, and he was followed in 1883 by D. C. Lathbury, a very distinguished journalist, who held office till 1899, after which he founded the *Pilot*. The *Guardian* maintained High Church principles with excellent fairness and ability.

The *Church Times* was established in 1863 by Mr. G. T. Palmer, its original proprietor, a man of editorial genius who controlled it till he died, being then succeeded by his son, the Rev. Henry Palmer. It began as a paper of eight pages, and for a considerable period its circulation did not exceed 8000 a week. If the biography of Dr. Richard F. Littledale were written,

we might learn interesting details about the genesis and early struggles of this journal. For he soon became its chief leader-writer and in many respects its life and soul, holding a prominent place on the staff down to his death in 1890. Other prominent contributors included the Rev. James Edward Vaux, and Canon W. Benham ('Peter Lombard'), whose genial, gossipy columns formed a feature of the paper. The *Church Times* was always courageous, caustic, and definite in convictions, the vigorous organ of a vigorous party.

Early in the nineteenth century the *Eclectic Review* was founded. It appeared in 1805 as an eighteen-penny monthly, and its principal editor was Daniel Parken. It appealed to Evangelical Churchmen as well as Nonconformists, and was supported by men like Zachary Macaulay, while its early contributors included James Montgomery, John Foster, and Robert Hall. Its second editor, Josiah Conder, took the reins in 1814, but confessed that it had 'long ceased to be a source of profit' when he transferred it in 1837 to Dr. Thomas Price. Probably in its palmiest days its circulation never exceeded 3000. About 1856 an attempt was made to revive it under J. B. Paton, who was assisted more or less by R. W. Dale. It finally perished at the close of 1868 under the editorship of Paxton Hood, who had taken charge of it in 1862 and in the end practically wrote it all himself.

The *British Quarterly Review* first appeared in January 1845. It was founded by Nonconformists who had become dissatisfied with the tone of the *Eclectic Review*, which then favoured the political ideas of Edward Miall. Its first editor was Dr. Robert Vaughan, the eloquent Principal of Lancashire College, Manchester, and father of Robert Alfred Vaughan who wrote 'Hours with the Mystics.' For twenty years he maintained it at a high level, which appealed to intelligent Nonconformists and advocated a conservative theological position. Dr. Vaughan was succeeded by Dr. Reynolds, of Cheshunt College: with him was associated Dr. Henry Allon, who ultimately became sole editor. In its prosperous days the *British*

*Quarterly* sold 2500 copies, but had sunk to 500 copies before it died in 1886.

The *British Quarterly* had a kind of successor in the *Congregational Review*, a shilling monthly which began in January 1887, under the editorship of J. G. Rogers, and continued until 1890. In this was also absorbed the *Congregationalist*, a sixpenny monthly, first published in 1871 and lasting till the end of 1886.

The *British Critic* began as a monthly magazine in 1814, and was originally edited by the Rev. James Shergold Boone, of St. John's, Paddington. In 1834 J. H. Newman became editor, and turned it into the chief organ of the Oxford Movement. To-day most of the writing appears dull and heavy. Early in 1841 Thomas Mozley succeeded Newman as editor and carried on the *Critic* till it was discontinued in 1843. Its place was taken by the *Christian Remembrancer*, which had originated in 1819, but in 1844 became a High Church quarterly, edited by William Scott (father of Clement Scott, the dramatic critic). The contributors included H. P. Liddon, John Duke Coleridge (afterwards Lord Chief Justice), and R. W. Church. It could seldom afford to pay its contributors decently, if at all, and it expired in 1868.

The *Church Quarterly Review*, first published in July 1875, had for its earliest editor Charles Knight Wilson. It represented High Church orthodoxy, and in its early days was opposed to modern Biblical criticism.

The *Contemporary Review*, which appeared in January 1866, had a distinctly Christian aim and spirit. Its prospectus was written by Dean Alford, and its first editor was James Knowles. Ten years later, however, owing to a dispute with his proprietors, the editor resigned, and in 1877 founded the *Nineteenth Century*. In December 1882 Percy W. Bunting became editor of the *Contemporary*, with J. B. Paton until 1887 as consulting editor.

The *London Quarterly Review* first appeared in October 1853 under Wesleyan auspices, edited by Dr. Rigg, who was followed later by the Rev. W. L. Watkinson.

Another religious quarterly had been founded in

1863, as the *Christian Ambassador*, and became in 1879 the *Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review*. This was in 1910 again transformed into the *Holborn Review*, now edited by Dr. A. S. Peake.

Amid this medley of competing religious journals and reviews Nicoll appeared as a Scottish stranger, hardly known outside his own Church and exiled from his pulpit by ill-health, and yet destined to exercise a power which had to be reckoned with by them all.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE *BRITISH WEEKLY*

In the autumn of 1886 Messrs Hodder & Stoughton, after careful consideration, resolved to found the *British Weekly*. They were then publishers of the *British Quarterly Review*, but the company to which it belonged was losing money and decided to discontinue it. Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton offered to take it over and to issue it as a Nonconformist monthly review, with Nicoll as editor. But the company consisted of Congregationalists, who did not wish the review to go out of their denomination. Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton thereupon decided to act on Nicoll's suggestion and to found a penny weekly paper under his editorship. He had proposed to call it the *Advance*; but Mr. Stoughton's choice, the *British Weekly*, was finally adopted.

To establish a new high-class weekly journal for the advocacy of social and religious progress must be, from the nature of the case, a hazardous, daunting, and laborious enterprise. At that particular juncture the attempt required no small courage both in its editor and in its proprietors. Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton took by far the heavier risk. They showed their immense confidence in Nicoll, for they supplied the whole capital and business organization, while they left him an entirely free hand in the management and policy of the paper. He agreed to work for nothing until the paper began to pay. On both sides it was a venture of faith. Nicoll came into the world of London journalism as an amateur from Scotland, he had at first no regular staff, and he was painfully handicapped by a weak lung. That year, moreover, the political outlook for Liberals seemed peculiarly

dark and disheartening. It was the year of the first Home Rule Bill, when the army of progress had just been rent asunder by an angry feud which ranged old comrades in hostile ranks. Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister in July, and candid friends might apply to the Liberal party Robert Hall's description of Unitarianism—'a headless trunk bleeding at every pore.' Multitudes of Nonconformists still cherished for Mr. Gladstone a passionate enthusiasm which Nicoll himself could not share. As a stalwart Free Churchman, he never relied on that subtle and imperious Anglo-Catholic to advance the religious causes which lay nearest to his own heart. The Irish problem, moreover, dominated the whole field of politics, and in that controversy Nicoll was a follower of Mr. Chamberlain. But the *British Weekly* set itself to sink personalities and to reunite and rally all true Liberals in a common campaign. The following letters reveal some of the editor's ideals and plans for his new paper, and show how deeply he pondered over the difficulties he had to meet.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

NORWOOD, *June* 16 [1886].

I am afraid to begin to write of journalism lest I never stop, as the subject is so interesting. You never wrote truer than when you say that the power of first-rate newspaper writing is very rare. The great difficulty to my mind is that of maintaining from week to week the seriousness and steady magnanimity which are absolutely essential to real influence. I think I could produce an interesting paper as well as any one else—but the temptations to personality, sarcasm, retaliation, are very great. If yielded to, influence goes. See the *Saturday Review*, which was never so clever as now; its editor, W. H. Pollock, I consider the very cleverest man in all England, and he and Austin Dobson every week have most brilliant writing. But the paper has no more influence than a penny trumpet. Then his maniacal spite has wrecked Stead. Lucy in the

*Daily News* has turned out a disastrous failure. On the other hand, the *Guardian*, *Spectator*, and *Standard*, especially the second, owe their power very much to the upright and candid tone in which they have always been written. I know my danger is there.

*To Professor Henry Drummond.*

GLENROY, UPPER NORWOOD, *Aug.* 3, 1886.

Dr. Dods has, I believe, told you something of the scheme for a new weekly paper which we have in hand. We mean to try to furnish a paper for Christian Radicals which shall be equal in literary merit to the best published. As the price will in all probability be a penny, we must provide popular features, so that it will resemble the *Pall Mall Gazette* more than the *Spectator*. An edition for Scotland will be published. I mean to ask as regular helpers in the political department T. Raleigh, who contested Edinburgh South lately, John Rae of the *Contemporary Review*, and G. P. Macdonell. In literature I don't expect difficulty.

A considerable effort will be made to float the paper. But if we do not succeed within a year, we shall not fight longer. We need 20,000 of a sale, to be on a really sound basis, and if we do not get 15,000 in six months I should be inclined to despair of the thing. Of the early numbers 100,000 will be printed, and we are hopeful they will speak for themselves.

I am endeavouring to get signed articles by eminent men for the first twenty numbers—so that the paper may come soon into notice. I have the prospect of one or two. It would give us a great lift if you would write one or two—say Impressions of Ireland.[1] I have no claim upon you, and I am

[1] Professor Drummond contributed an unsigned leader on Ireland to the *British Weekly* in November, and another in December entitled 'Liberalism, the Christianity of Politics.' He also wrote two signed articles on 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World' (which had secured great popularity since its publication in 1885), and these appeared in January 1887.

well aware you could dispose of your work in some ways more advantageously. But I believe you will feel sympathy with the object, and that you will see of what great importance it is that the paper should attract attention from the first.

Perhaps I should explain that as to the unfortunate Irish question I am an adherent of Mr. Chamberlain. But in the leading articles we should aim simply at the re-union of the Liberal party, avoiding everything that could irritate. In the signed articles we should allow free expression to both sides.

This is rather an anxious business to me; the risk is so great: but I have felt it right to try it, and upon the whole am much more hopeful than not. We propose starting about the beginning of November.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

NORWOOD, *Aug.* 7, 1886.

I have been exceedingly busy about the paper. There has not been more than the usual amount of cold water and contendings, and I am well pleased with the look of things. The title has been the chief trouble. At last we have almost fixed on 'The British Weekly'—*à la* 'British Quarterly.' I hope you will at least not be violent against this. You were in favour of 'A Journal of Christian Progress,' as a second title. The fact is we can't please everybody, or say one-tenth of everybody, but if we can only get the one-tenth! We must have 20,000 subscribers, and there is not that number of intelligent people in the country—so we must condescend to weak minds. I wrote to Drummond as humbly as I could, but telling him frankly I was a Chamberlainite. To tell you the truth, I felt great compunction in asking his help, for I cannot believe that all that evangelizing, banqueting, reconciling, and philandering can ever be the material of a sincere and healthy life.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

NORWOOD, *Aug.* 18, 1886.

If the paper does, it will help very much our other schemes : if not, we must emigrate. Hodder thinks the Lofoden Islands, from which he has come lately, would do—as cheap, healthy, and free from humiliating reminders in the shape of books and papers.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

NORWOOD, *Oct.* 5, 1886.

The mortality among magazines this year is frightful. The following are dead, or die in the year :

*Interpreter.*
*British Quarterly.*
*British and Foreign Evangelical Review.*
*Clergyman's Magazine.*
*Congregationalist.*

In all these cases but one the death is due simply to editorial carelessness and incapacity.

*To Mr. J. Macniven, Edinburgh.*

NORWOOD, *Oct.* 15, 1886.

I have got as much good advice as would sink a navy, and had as many difficulties started as would cover Great Britain if they were trees, and have had to find courage, hope, and will for a hundred. But I have taken all very coolly, and am confident that working together we shall make it a great success. My chief consolation has been the history of the American editor who died lately at the age of 90, and attributed his health and longevity entirely to the fact that he never expected to please anybody and never tried to.

I would have everything treated in a Christian spirit, but I think Christianity means not so much the mere naming the name of Christ as departing from iniquity.

The first number of *The British Weekly : a Journal of Social and Christian Progress*, appeared on Friday,

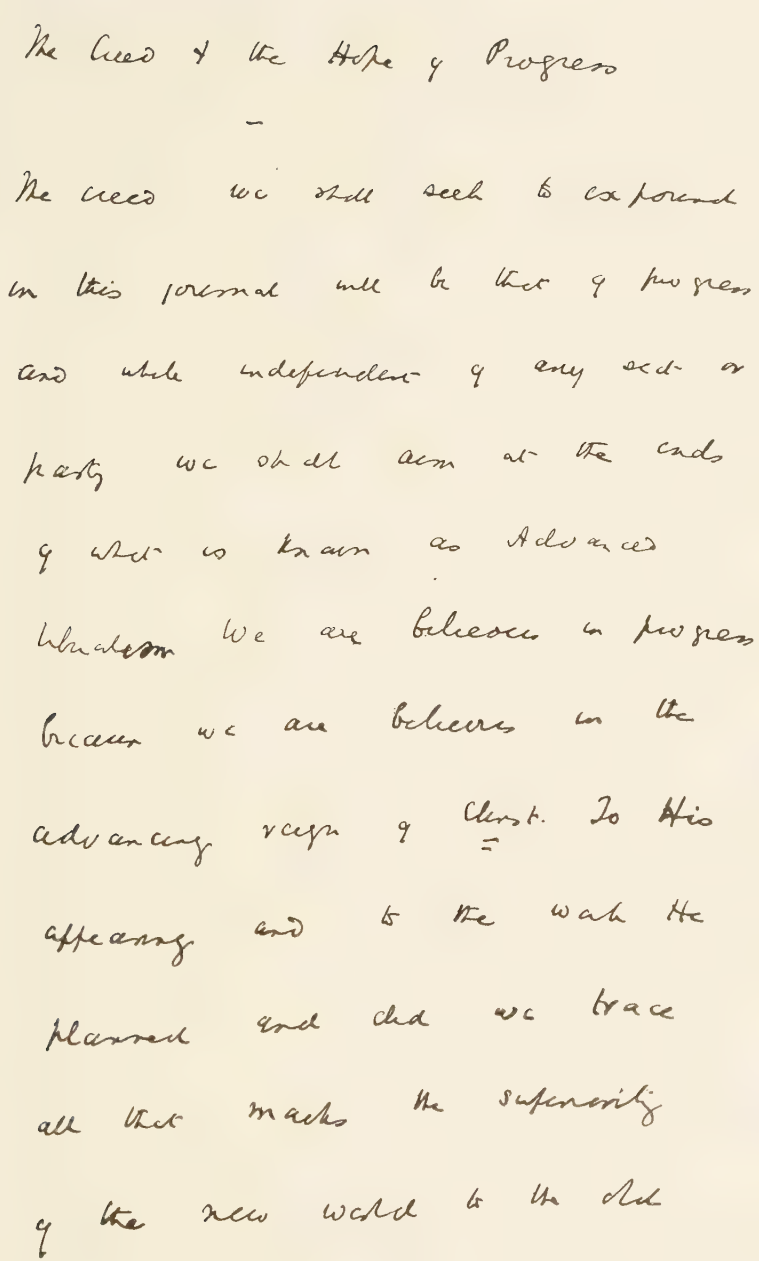
November 5, 1886. It consisted of twenty pages, printed in two wide columns on a page. In appearance it resembled the *Pall Mall Gazette*, as then published. The editor's opening article was entitled 'The Creed and Hope of Progress,' and deplored the cleavage among Liberals caused by the Home Rule controversy. In the second number a leading article on 'The Nonconformist Invasion of Oxford' warmly welcomed the founding of Mansfield College. The editor's characteristic interests showed themselves in a series of 'New Literary Anecdotes,' which included unpublished letters by Lord Macaulay and George Eliot, and reproduced an unpublished pencil-sketch of Anne Brontë by her sister Charlotte.

But the novel feature of the paper which arrested public attention was to announce the results of a new religious census of London. This enumerating of worshippers in all the churches and chapels of the metropolis had been carried out simultaneously with elaborate care on the morning and evening of Sunday, October 24. The returns were carefully arranged and printed by weekly instalments, followed by a summary which enforced the broad lessons of the census as a whole. It appeared that out of a population of over 4,000,000 about 1,000,000 persons had attended at one service or both on that particular Sunday.[1]

A successful series of articles, 'Books which have influenced me,' began in January 1887, and many well-known men contributed to it. Among these were Robert Louis Stevenson, Walter Besant, P. G. Hamerton, W. T. Stead, and Professor Blackie. John Ruskin wrote two felicitous letters, and Mr. Gladstone sent a characteristic post-card.

From the very outset the paper had no abler and more constant contributor than Dr. Marcus Dods, who

[1] Mr. Spurgeon's total congregations on that morning and evening at the Metropolitan Tabernacle exceeded 10,000 people—considerably more than the corresponding congregations for the same Sunday in St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey put together. But over the whole of London the proportion of Anglican to Protestant Nonconformist worshippers was about 3 to 2.



The Creed of the Hope of Progress

The creed we shall seek to expound in this journal will be that of progress and while independent of any sect or party we shall aim at the ends of what is known as Advanced Liberalism. We are believers in progress because we are believers in the advancing reign of Christ. To His appearing and to the walk He planned and did we trace all that marks the superiority of the new world to the old

Facsimile autograph of the Editor's opening Article in the first number of the "British Weekly," November 5, 1886

gave invaluable help by his counsel as well as by his pen.

The following letters throw sidelights on the problem of establishing and editing a new religious journal.

*To Mr. J. Macniven, Edinburgh.*

LONDON, *Nov.* 9, 1886.

The census is doing us enormous good, and I don't know how we should have got a hearing without it.

I never expected to reach the masses, as the *Christian Herald* does. But I hoped to reach the vast number of educated Nonconformists in Scotland and England who take no Christian paper, and despise the Nonconformist religious papers for their want of culture. I hope especially to get the ministers.

Nicoll had already assured Dr. Marcus Dods : 'To one who has been twelve years a Free Church minister the labour of editing seems trifling and the worry *nil*.' He wrote again to Mr. Macniven on November 22 : 'I do not find the work at all hard ; in fact it rather amuses me.' A fortnight later, however, he was compelled to confess to the same friend : 'With the tooth-drawings and the opium-injections of the last few days I am fairly done up, and indeed I ought to be in bed to-day. It would be very unfortunate if I were sent abroad just at the very time the paper was taking its place—for I have a hundred ideas in my head yet to develop, and nobody could do it for me.'

*To Professor X.*

UPPER NORWOOD, *Nov.* 26, 1886.

It is a great mistake of W. to think he has nothing to learn from Spurgeon. And that attitude makes Spurgeon angry and alienated. We cannot overlook facts—and the fact is that the Spurgeonic type of preaching is the only kind that moves the democracy. I know there are very repulsive elements about all that set of people. But I know, and so do

you, that they are the salt of the earth. My great desire is to treat them with sympathy and respect, and so to be able to teach them by degrees more charitable views. That is not at all difficult for me —I mean, the first thing—as my sympathies are, and have always been, almost entirely with them. Much as I have learned from W., I think him quite dark on that side.

I mean to have discussed [in the *B.W.*] some of the theological questions which my experience as editor shows me have an extraordinary interest for multitudes and yet are quite neglected by scholars. Thus I mean to have a discussion on the Second Advent, introduced by Beet and Godet. I will give a fair hearing to both sides.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

NORWOOD, *Dec.* 11, 1886.

As you say, one has vexatious things. But I do not get into tempers as a rule ; it is so exhausting. No ; the secret of tranquillity is 'adopt the recumbent position.'

We had a conference yesterday [about the *B.W.*] and went carefully over matters. The net result is that with 4000 more we should be safe. Last number (16 pp.) just cleared its expense. Hodder & Stoughton seem now confident, and are to push largely in Scotland and England for the new year.

I have not been at all anxious about the matter. The loss incurred [1] in case of failure is not very great, and in some ways I should rather be free to work at things less burdensome. I have several very congenial and much easier plans. Yet there is a pleasure in being vexed as other men and plagued as others be.

NORWOOD, *Jan.* 29, 1887.

The *B.W.* is by many degrees the heaviest task I have ever undertaken, and if I can pull it through I

[1] *I.e.* by Nicoll personally. The loss to the proprietors would have been very serious indeed. But they never worried the editor about finance, and encouraged him in every possible way.

shall have a right to sober elation. There is no good talking about difficulties ; they would daunt any one. The circulation is steadily increasing every week. This week every news-agent ordered more.

NORWOOD, *Jan.* 1887.

I have now a real interest in the Infant Phenomenon, and am anxious to pull it through. One must take the mean of opinion. Without circulation you can do nothing. We must get that up 3000 before the financial basis is really sound. It is easy to speak about signed articles by men in high position. Getting them is another matter. They have less influence on sales than one would suppose. Drummond's articles did very little for us ; and Peek, the proprietor of the *Contemporary Review*, who lives here, says an article by [Cardinal] Newman [in that review] only raised the sale 200 copies.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

NORWOOD, *Feb.* 5, 1887.

The *B.W.* is increasing steadily, though slowly. I think now it will go on. It involves great labour ; but still I cannot bear to be idle, and the work is in the main a pleasure to me. We are popularizing it as much as we can, while keeping up its character.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

NORWOOD, *March* 5, 1887.

We are really getting on. I fully expect we shall be up to our highest anticipation by the time the six months are out. But what a business it has been to me [1] no one would suppose, and I must regularly watch every detail for at least two months more.

We had an adventure yesterday, having nearly lost ourselves in Epping Forest. A tremendous fog came down. We were indebted to a Congregational minister—a rationalist, I am sorry to say ; but he has large fires and can poke.

[1] On March 14 he wrote to his father : 'I still cough at nights.'

NORWOOD, *May*, 1887.

If I were to tell you all I have gone through since I saw you, you would be 'a Niobe all tears,' or you ought to be. I do not think I have ever been so worried and tempted to throw it all up. It is so very difficult to get good help.

I am glad you liked R. L. Stevenson, but these articles make little difference to the sale.[1] It is personal matter that people like. Don't you think there is something sickly about R. L. S.—perfume at best—opium at worst? He is not *fresh* in the right way, is he? I think Mark Rutherford a much greater master of English style.

NORWOOD, *June*, 1887.
[The month of Queen Victoria's Jubilee.]

My father has paid his first visit to London at the age of 75. I drove him round the whole place and he was highly pleased, taking a lively interest in everything.

The heat suits me, and I have been fearfully and wonderfully well—so much so that I must start another weekly and begin preaching to keep myself in check.

NORWOOD, *Sept.* 1887.

We are very much encouraged about the *B.W.*: the sales are very good and increasing. I do not now feel any burden of it, and am thinking of starting other things.

NORWOOD, *Oct.* 7, 1887.

I slipped in Chancery Lane and fell on my right elbow. It looked as if my arm was broken, but it was not—only severe dislocation of the muscles. As you may imagine, I had a nice time of it. It was awfully sore, and I had to carry it in a sling for a fortnight. However, I got some good of it, for I was in arrears of correspondence with all my relatives,

[1] As a matter of fact the sale of the *British Weekly* number which contained Stevenson's article on 'Books that have influenced me' was 200 fewer than that of the previous week.

so I dictated letters with harrowing accounts of the accident and *not mentioning the date*. This was wrong, but the recording angel dropped a tear when he thought of my nights.

NORWOOD, *Oct.* 14, 1887.

I think any one who has read the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence will think that Emerson had a great deal more feeling than one would gather from Cabot's book,[1] which I am sending you to review. There is no attempt to explain the strange outgrowth of Transcendentalism on New England soil—its singular freedom from rancour, its contempt of books, its return to the earth. I have never seen anything good about Margaret Fuller. Everything obvious about her was laughable, and she was scrawny and ugly—but compare her Essay on Goethe with Hutton's : it is as much better as West than East.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

NORWOOD, *Dec.* 16, 1887.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I suppose you will indignantly disavow the beginning, for I know I am past redemption this time. However, I am afraid that, at least until I have more help, I will never be much of a correspondent again. I have for four days of the week to make such a constant use of pen and ink that I utterly loathe them on the two days I have free ; and in fact my safety is not to touch them at all, but to be out as much as possible or to rest. You must write me as often as you in your charity can, and especially every year you must come and see me. I mean this. I do not see any prospect of doing much at letter-writing again. Last week I received nearly 500 letters which had to be dealt with one way or other.

There has been another thing since I wrote. As you know, I had a pretty serious breakdown, owing

[1] 'A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson,' by James Elliot Cabot. Macmillan. Reviewed by Dr. Dods in the *British Weekly*, November 18, 1887.

> to preaching. [In October] I preached two Sundays running, and that brought on a sharp recurrence of the old symptoms. Two numbers and nearly all a third of the *B.W.* were edited from between the blankets. . . . I am now pretty well again, but nothing so well as I was before this illness. However, it is a comfort when the way is shut up and the door bolted and barred. I should have much enjoyed preaching.

Before the end of 1887 the 'Infant Phenomenon' was evidently feeling its feet. Among the earliest contributors were Principal Edwards, of Aberystwith; Professor A. S. Wilkins, of Manchester; Miss Edith Simcox; and A. W. W. Dale, then of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. On July 1, 1887, the paper contained the first of many articles by J. M. Barrie, who signed himself 'Gavin Ogilvy.' He was then writing for the *St. James's Gazette*, but from that date he contributed regularly to the *B.W.*, where his novel, 'When a Man's Single,' began to appear as a serial in October 1887.[1]

In the same month the *B.W.* printed the first of a striking series of articles on 'Tempted London,' describing the snares which beset young men and women in the crowded city. These articles were the result of personal investigations and thoroughly trustworthy. They soon aroused deep and widespread interest, and the circulation increased so largely that there was no more doubt as to the future of the paper. From that time it never looked back, but always went steadily forward. The editor wrote in retrospect: 'As all journalists know, it is not so very difficult to bring a paper within sight of success, but extremely difficult to carry it over the bar.'

It was in the fifty-second number of the paper, on October 28, 1887, that Nicoll published the earliest of his familiar letters signed 'Claudius Clear.' At the outset one or two friends took part in this correspondence; but the joint plan proved difficult to carry out, and before long the 'Claudius' came to be written

[1] It was published as a volume in October 1888.

regularly each week by the versatile editor himself. Therein he discoursed at large on all manner of themes —literary, ethical, topographical, and personal—continuing his letters year after year with few interruptions up to the year in which he died.

Mr. David Williamson, the experienced journalist who now edits the *Daily Mail Year Book*, supplies a vivid glimpse of the earliest days of the *British Weekly*. 'When the paper began, I was working for its printers, Messrs. Hazell, Watson & Viney, in an office adjoining that which Nicoll used to occupy on press-days. His personality was a source of continual interest. He always arrived muffled up, and seemed acutely sensitive to draughts. He said very little, but his Scottish accent often puzzled the compositors who brought him proofs. Occasionally visitors would call, but he discouraged them on press-days when his whole attention needed to be focussed on the paper. Even at that time the editor's correspondence was very heavy, and by the end of the day his room became a wilderness of littered envelopes, proofs, and useless copy. There on various occasions I saw J. M. Barrie—white-faced, nervous, and shy. He took particular pains with proofs, realizing that the dialect-conversation in his sketches lent itself readily to laughable errors.'

Long afterwards, in conversation with Miss Stoddart, who served as his invaluable assistant for more than thirty years, Nicoll himself made this confession: 'Before you came and when I was quite alone with the *British Weekly*, I wrote the whole of the thing, and with my own hand. For a year the fate of the paper hung in the balance, and it was just a question whether any day I might be informed that Hodder & Stoughton had made up their minds they would close it. So I always had the feeling that I might go home to tell my wife it was all up. I used often to consider myself that it would be better for me to give it up; I had not strength to carry it on.'

The power of the paper lay in its individuality and independence. The editor wrote: 'When I began to plan the *British Weekly*, I determined that under

no circumstances should it represent any official party or take any official advice, but that it should be in every respect entirely independent.' To Dr. Marcus Dods he declared: 'I represent nobody but myself; my party is under my hat and will remain so. With all my crimes I am conscious of never having written to please people—of very often doing the reverse. So long as the *B.W.* flourishes, I don't see how I can leave it. But if it didn't, I should go with a very easy mind. It is a great labour and a great burden, and not less as time goes on, and I could manage well enough without it and have a free life, which I haven't now.'

The *British Weekly* prospered and succeeded mainly by virtue of one man. He himself conceived the idea of it, and planned the details, and carried out the enterprise [1] from first to last. Very few persons are endowed with the varied gifts and powers needed for a great editor. But Nicoll transcended normal standards. His treasures of knowledge lay at the command of an amazing memory. His instinct for news went with journalistic skill to present and arrange news effectively. He had a kind of editorial second sight; he discerned subjects that were occupying the public mind, and with uncanny intuition he singled out the subjects that mattered most. On occasion he could write in two or three different styles of English, each masterly of its kind. He held tenaciously to his own convictions, and never hesitated to proclaim them in trenchant words. But above and beyond all else, Nicoll glowed and tingled with that precious, indefinable thing which we name personality. He was always so characteristically himself, always so fiercely and terribly alive. No journal can become powerful which is edited in the temper of a tame rabbit. But this editor had in his blood some drops of the mysterious daemonic quality which creates captains and prophets and raises them above the ruck of common men.

[1] On the other hand, it must be remembered how largely the paper owed its existence and financial success to its sagacious, loyal and experienced proprietors, Mr. M. H. Hodder and Mr. T. W. Stoughton.

Of Armand Carrel, the French journalist whose statue stands in Rouen, a critic declared that 'he did not merely conduct *Le National* : he was *Le National*.' In the same way, it would be quite inadequate to say that Nicoll conducted the *British Weekly* : he was the *British Weekly*. From the beginning he pervaded his paper, writing leaders and paragraphs and reviews with equal ease and distinction, and infusing each page with his own energy and vitality. The late Principal Cairns admitted that it was the one religious paper which he could ever read right through ; he meant, of course, that like thousands of other readers he found it entirely interesting. The editor might often annoy people, or even enrage them, but they wanted to see what the editor had to say.

Nicoll attained this influence by the way in which he brought his own personality into direct contact with such multitudes of men. Perhaps no modern journalist came habitually so close to his readers, and seemed so conscious of their existence as individual persons, and made so many of them aware that he felt a certain personal responsibility for them—that they belonged to his flock to whom he owed guidance week by week. Nicoll was superbly successful in his own journal, because there he could give full and free expression to himself. In its columns he poured out his opulent knowledge, his beliefs and hopes, his experiences and thoughts and views of things, with inexhaustible freshness and fertility ; striking a note not always profound but always arresting and original, speaking with a voice which soon began to echo through the literary, political, and religious world.

One unique feature of the *British Weekly* from its beginning was the religious article on the front page. For the first three years of the paper's existence, every opening leader came from the editor's pen, and for twenty years afterwards he generally wrote four out of every five. To quote his own words : 'I had always thought that religious papers did not give enough direct religious instruction, and that the leading articles should be mainly devoted to this, not to ecclesi-

astical matters or politics or literature chiefly, but to religion.' He realized that great numbers of Christian people were hungry for Christian teaching, if only it could be given to them in competent form week by week. Scripture, as Jurien said, is little else than a tissue of prayers and thanksgivings ; whereas religion is often so presented that it seems little else than ecclesiastical activity and theological controversy. First-rate devotional writing has always been extremely rare. Nicoll, however, possessed this unusual gift. He was thoroughly at home both in theology and in literature, and he knew how to wield the resources of English style. Nothing else that he wrote cost him so much thought and toil as his devotional articles. But they pierced below the surface to the spiritual secrets at the core of Christianity, and discussed the mysteries of the inward life with a kindling glow of passion which set other souls aflame.

Christian teachers as contrasted as F. D. Maurice and C. H. Spurgeon have agreed in their judgment that in these days no ministerial position is equal in importance to that of a man who can collect and hold a constituency which will read his religious instruction. In the *British Weekly* Nicoll never ceased preaching to a great and listening audience until he died.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PROGRESS

His removal to London from a small Scottish town like Kelso formed the main landmark in Nicoll's life. For it introduced him into a world of which he had hitherto known almost nothing. As editor of a new paper he found many doors opening to welcome him or left ajar for him to enter, and he made his way through them all. He discovered that to be at home in a library and a pulpit was quite different from being at home in Fleet Street and in club-land. This momentous change could not but produce lasting effects upon the young minister. Gradually his whole outlook broadened, his judgments grew surer, he gained more actual grasp of affairs, while his personality and power as a journalist soon developed so as to command attention.

The *British Weekly* succeeded, not because it was amiable and colourless, but because its editor held strong definite convictions, and could use trenchant weapons in controversy, and never shrank from taking a courageous line. For example, from the very first he attacked the Erastian position and contended for religious equality. In December 1887, he wrote: 'Our quarrel is not with the Church of England or the Church of Scotland, and we can frankly and joyfully admit all that may justly be claimed for them. Even if in faith and worship they were absolutely pure, we should still say that their establishment was politically unjust and spiritually harmful.'

In 1887 there broke out among Baptists what was known as the Down Grade Controversy. The real questions at issue were akin to those involved in the 'Fundamentalist' conflict which just at present

troubles so many Churches in the United States. But in this country by ill hap the dispute became centred and entangled round a great religious personality. Mr. Spurgeon, the most popular of Evangelical preachers, charged his fellow-ministers with lapsing from the faith, and on that ground publicly resigned his membership of the Baptist Union. No Christian leader in England was more widely known or more justly revered, and his action produced a profound and painful sensation. The *British Weekly* boldly supported the Baptist Union, protesting that such imputations were baseless and ought never to have been made. Unhappily, however, Mr. Spurgeon rejected all overtures of conciliation, and the lacerating dispute dragged on until his death in 1892.

Towards the end of 1887, Professor Elmslie, of the English Presbyterian Church College, began to write for the *B.W.*, and though his direct contributions were not numerous, the editor testified that ' the advantage of personal intercourse with him was unspeakable. I have never learned so much from any other human being.' The death of this gifted man, in November 1889, came as a heavy blow to his friends and indeed to Free Church life in London, where few preachers won the ear of larger and more thoughtful congregations.

In his leading article on December 23, 1887, the editor of the *B.W.* could assure his readers that ' the circulation attained by our journal is larger than has ever been reached by any religious paper in the same period, and is steadily growing.' The general verdict was expressed in January 1888 by the *Liverpool Daily Post* : ' The *British Weekly* has, after a year's existence, fully justified its claim to rank in the van of religious organs in this country. To those who are acquainted with its many and varied merits, its increasing popularity occasions no surprise. Our contemporary's prospectus for this year is an ambitious, interesting and comprehensive one, and includes " The Religious Census of London, Part II." ; " Contemporary Pulpit Portraits," drawn from life by the inimitable pencil of

the famous Harry Furniss ; " Discussions on Holiness and Baptism " ; " Tempted London : Young Women " ; and " A Discussion on Socialism and Christianity." '

During the year 1888, the *B.W.* printed J. M. Barrie's articles, which were afterwards collected and published as ' An Edinburgh Eleven.' Dr. Alexander Whyte's sermons and lectures began to appear in its columns, which introduced this great Edinburgh preacher to a host of English readers.

In May 1888, Nicoll issued the *British Weekly Pulpit*, a penny weekly containing reports of sermons, which survived until the end of 1890. In October the *B.W.* was enlarged, and printed with three columns on a page. The first number of the new series contained a sketch of Lord Rosebery, by J. M. Barrie, and an article by Josiah Gilbert. In 1889 the paper was further enlarged, with four columns on a page, and included contributions from James Runciman, J. A. Spender, and ' Deas Cromarty ' (the wife of Dr. R. A. Watson of Dundee). Dr. Parker wrote occasionally, as did Dr. R. W. Dale, who was always ' a wise counsellor and warm friend.' From about this date Dr. Denney began to use his powerful pen in the *B.W.*, and went on writing increasingly down to his death in 1917. Among the earlier serials were stories by ' John Law ' (Miss M. E. Harkness) and ' Annie S. Swan ' (Mrs. Burnett-Smith).

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

NORWOOD, *March* 10, 1888.

I am expecting to get away to Italy for three weeks about the end of the month. It is very hard for me to get away, as I have so many things in hand, but I think I have made pretty good arrangements, and I hope nothing will prevent it.

You get all that I am thinking in my articles, and all I am doing in ' Claudius Clear,' so I have no news at all. The *B.W.* has increased since the new year about 5000 copies weekly, and I expect will

soon reach its limit. Now that it is paying, I think of other things; but sufficient unto the day. I have much reason to be thankful, for I have little hope of being able to do much in preaching. My left lung is still weak and I need to be careful.

At the end of March, Nicoll visited North Italy, staying at Genoa, Florence, Verona, and Milan.

During 1888 two new books appeared—'Lux Mundi' and 'Robert Elsmere'—both of which excited keen interest as well as controversy. The first serious criticism to be published of the latter volume was written by Nicoll as a leader entitled 'The Woman of Feeling,' in the *British Weekly* of March 9. Long afterwards, in a letter which he received from Mrs. Humphry Ward in 1911, she said, 'I remember the fair and kindly review of "Robert Elsmere."'

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

PATERNOSTER ROW, *April* 25, 1888.

I. Brimstone.

1. I post to-morrow a copy of Principal Edwards on 'Hebrews' in the *Expositor's Bible*. It is not yet out, but could you manage a review for next week's *B.W.*?

2. As you have ideas on Matthew Arnold's theology, could you write anything on it for the *Expositor*? or suggest?

3. More of the *Expositor* series?

II. Treacle.

Your 'Genesis' [in the *Expositor's Bible*, published January 1888] has beaten all the others of the set in sale, and we are at present out of copies. Hooray!

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C., *May* 29, 1888.

I hope you will spare me an afternoon or evening, and dine with me at the National Liberal Club. Barrie and one or two other impious men wish to meet you.

NORWOOD, *June* 28, 1888.

The Dictionary [of National Biography] dinner [1] was a great success. Leslie Stephen very lachrymose, and more like a disenchanted Don Quixote than ever—George Smith, the publisher, pathetic and patronizing—[Dr. Augustus] Jessopp, the most radiant and round-faced of men, gave an inimitable speech in proposing L. S.'s health, every sentence a hit. I fraternized mostly with G. J. Holyoake—a fine old fellow and a great friend of Hale White's.

NORWOOD [*late in June*, 1888].

I am wrestling with George Adam Smith's 'Isaiah': [2] he has chopped up the prophet terribly. I go on, like Isaac of York in 'Ivanhoe,' ''Tis a rash youth. . . . 'Tis a goodly youth.'

Henry Drummond is here, and I am to hear him on Sunday: I will tell you what I think. His 'Tropical Africa' is doing well in spite of the booksellers who tried to boycott it. It is almost the only book of travels (except 'Typee' and 'Omoo') that left any ideas in my mind. He has a Sapphire Blue Velvet Waistcoat like the Body of Heaven in its clearness.

NORWOOD [*early in July*, 1888].

I was very much pleased with Drummond.[3] He took 'The Programme of Christianity,' from 'The Lord God hath anointed me to preach, etc.' His line in the first part was to show that Christianity takes everything in—socialism, etc. Then he gave a kind of sermon on the text—very good. He concluded with an appeal and a prayer. What he said was excellent, and his manner was even better than his matter—both manly and modest—just the right thing. There was a very fine audience: I have

[1] Of contributors to the *D.N.B.*, at the Star and Garter, Richmond, on June 27. See 'Claudius Clear' in the *B.W.* of July 6.

[2] In the *Expositor's Bible*, the first series of which began to appear early in 1888.

[3] Professor Drummond addressed a meeting at Grosvenor House on Sunday afternoon, July 2, 1888, Lord Aberdeen presiding.

seldom seen so many characteristic heads, and the address could do nothing but good.

*To Mr. J. Crowlesmith.*

[At that time General Manager for Messrs. Hazell, Watson & Viney, who printed the *British Weekly* for very many years.]

GLENROY, UPPER NORWOOD, *Nov.* 12, 1888.

I think it is right that I should express to you my great satisfaction with the way in which the *British Weekly* is printed. Alike in freedom from error and in appearance, it compares favourably with any penny paper. I am aware that this is largely due to your indefatigable efforts to meet my wishes, and I am anxious you should know that I appreciate this.

*P.S.*—I cannot speak in too strong terms of the ability, courtesy and helpfulness of my friend Mr. Burke.[1]

The closing weeks of 1888 laid sorrowful burdens on Nicoll. Mrs. Dunlop, his mother-in-law, died at Kelso in November. His wife's diary for November 16 records that he arrived there before the end, 'and his prayers comforted her very much.' Then on November 25 his infant son Louis Dunlop, eight months old, died at Norwood. On a white marble cross above their child's grave the parents inscribed the text: 'My thoughts are not as your thoughts, saith the Lord.'

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

22 HIGHLAND ROAD, NORWOOD [*Dec.* 1888].

For nearly the first time in my life my work is almost beyond me and fearfully in arrears. Thus I have to write the whole of an article on Cheyne for the *Expositor* before I go to bed to-night, else the

[1] At that time the Overseer of the Composing Department, a man for whom Nicoll had a very great regard.

number will be late ; and I shall be without any rest till Saturday night next week, when thank Heaven I shall have a clear week to make up for lost time.

The explanation of the last sentence is that Christmas Day that year fell on a Tuesday, and consequently the *B.W.* for Christmas week had to go to press on the Saturday preceding. Mrs. Nicoll's diary records that Christmas Eve ' finds me at ten o'clock alone. Willie in bed with his neuralgia—an attack brought on by overwork. He got his article on Cheyne written, and two numbers of the *B.W.* out last week. He has been sadly overtired.'

However, the year closed with the following note in the *B.W.* : ' It is a matter of simple historical fact that this journal has developed with a rapidity hitherto unexampled in the history of religious newspapers.'

## CHAPTER IX

### AT HAMPSTEAD

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

27 Paternoster Row, E.C. [*January*, 1889].

I have been awfully bothered about a house. We are leaving Norwood, and I wanted to get within the cab radius. So we have been looking a while in Hampstead, and after innumerable journeys and interviews have got one at last. It is a large and pretty old house, and as the stables are let at a good rent I get it for little more than our present rent though it is twice as large. I hope we shall see you there in spring. It is very accessible.

27 Paternoster Row, E.C. [*end of February*, 1889].

We are delighted with the house : it is really a charming old place and so quiet. You must come and see us as you pass through. Your vision was not untrue : it is a terrible thing turning up so many papers [in the removal from Norwood] and waking ghosts, white, black and grey.

The new house was Bay Tree Lodge, Frognal—a roomy Georgian dwelling, which stands not far behind Hampstead parish church. Dr. Johnson at one time made his quarters in Frognal, where he is believed to have written 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'—one tradition says, under the roof of Bay Tree Lodge. Nicoll and his family moved there in February, in a snowstorm, and it became his home for the rest of his life. Mrs. Nicoll found great delight in the garden, with its wistaria and clematis flowering over the verandah. One of their nearest neighbours was Sir

Walter Besant, while higher up the hill were the houses of Canon Ainger, Mr. George Du Maurier, and Mrs. Charles, author of 'The Schönberg-Cotta Family.' Beyond, at the top of Frognal, opens the East Heath, of which Nicoll wrote : 'The true beauty of Hampstead is, and will long abide, in what lies before us here —the bracken and heather and trees that stretch away to Hendon. If it is neither a Bank Holiday nor Saturday afternoon, the chances are that you will find the East Heath a delicious solitude. For a nobler prospect or clearer air you will go far. The silence is subtly pleasant, with its suggestions of the full tide of human existence not five miles away.'

Throughout the late summer and autumn of 1889 Nicoll was busy writing the biography of James Macdonell. Mrs. Nicoll's diary for November 22 records that 'to-night Willie finished the last chapter of his book. I am very glad, for it has been troublesome to him.' This volume—the most careful and elaborate work he had as yet produced—appeared a fortnight before Christmas. 'James Macdonell, Journalist,' was a brilliant man after Nicoll's own heart. Born of Highland stock on Aberdeenshire soil, he had spent his boyhood not many miles from Lumsden. After serving on prominent papers in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Newcastle, he came up to London and by sheer ability and industry rose rapidly to the front rank of his profession. He became leader-writer on the *Daily Telegraph*, and when little more than thirty was appointed to a similar post on the *Times*, which he held till his death at the early age of thirty-seven. The biography endeavoured to describe Macdonell's life as a journalist—to show the discipline and perseverance by which he gained his position. It also illustrated the history of the contemporary press, in which Nicoll himself always took the keenest interest, and gave impressions of eminent journalists like Delane and Chenery, both editors of the *Times*. The biographer thus defined the purpose of the book : 'I was anxious that some record of his life should be written for the sake of journalism—a profession which has many

heroes who die unknown ; for the sake of the increasing multitude of thoughtful and able young men who are looking forward to that honourable labour as their life-work, that they might learn in how great a spirit it may be pursued.'

Perhaps the surest proof that Nicoll succeeded in his intention may be found in the fact that so sagacious and distinguished a journalist as Sir Henry W. Lucy ('Toby, M.P.'), in his book 'Faces and Places,' advised all about to adopt journalism as a profession to study this life of James Macdonell.[1]

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD [*end of December*, 1889].

The *B.W.* has been very successful since last enlarged.[2] Circulation increasing every week. If it does equally well another year, a valuable property will have been created—not without labour, it is true, but I am glad it is done. Every time I preach [3] shows me that it is not at all likely I shall ever be able to do much in that line again, and I am glad I can do something.

Early in the new year Nicoll undertook to prepare a memoir of his friend, Professor Elmslie, who had died in November 1889. This book appeared in the autumn of 1890 as 'Life of Professor W. G. Elmslie, D.D. : Memoir and Sermons,' edited by W. R. Nicoll and A. N. Macnicoll.

In March 1890 the degree of LL.D. was conferred upon the editor of the *Expositor* and the *British Weekly* by Aberdeen University, his *Alma Mater*. Mrs. Nicoll adds in her diary : 'This honour is all the greater as it was in no way solicited. Three professors had his name on their lists.'

[1] In the *Newspaper World*, Feb. 2, 1924, Mr. John Grigor wrote : 'The revealing character of this biography deterred, it can authoritatively be said, one of Scotland's most distinguished editors and men of letters from adventuring on a journalistic career in London.'

[2] On October 4, 1889, with four columns to the page.

[3] On November 24, Nicoll had preached a funeral sermon on the death of his friend, Professor Elmslie.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

27 Paternoster Row, E.C., *Aug.* 26, 1890.

I am working away steadily, and have reason to be very thankful for the general prosperity of everything. But I have not got over the feeling of always being tired, though my health is as good as ever it was. I have done very little in the way of preaching, as it takes more out of me than I can well spare. I will have another sub-editor in the winter, but have more schemes in view, so that the work will be likely much as before—though my hands will be freer, which would be a great thing. It is not the amount of work, but the being tied which I feel to be irksome.

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead [*December*, 1890].

I am very delighted to hear about your comfort since your return. We need these bright bits in life, and God is good : we get them when we need them.

As I write I am expecting a visit from—who do you think?—A. V. R. Milne and his son. We asked them up to spend the afternoon. The young man has taken up a very heavy handful in South Kensington : [1] the congregation is reduced to a few gnarled roots.

. . . Alas, sir, we belong to the past generation and shall soon be shelved ! But if we have been busy in our day——

The year closed with weeks of snow and intense frost. Just before Christmas Nicoll went north to his old church at Kelso, for the induction of a new minister there. Then on New Year's Day he heard General Booth give an address on ' Darkest England ' in the City Temple. Mrs. Nicoll's diary describes the General as ' a picturesque figure, standing in the pulpit amid swarms of Salvationists. His dress is very becoming—a scarlet under-jersey, with a large

[1] Where he had just become minister of the Presbyterian Church.

gold cross in the centre, and a dark blue coat. Willie says he is a mixture of the pawnbroker and the prophet in appearance. His enthusiasm and sanguine hopes are affecting.' In the first week of 1891, Nicoll set out for Italy, travelling through to Rome, and spending a fortnight there and at Naples in quest of sunshine. He wrote from Naples : ' I have been very diligent and have really seen a lot. I cannot help being anxious about my papers, and the distance is dreadful. . . . I am quite well and comfortable, but can't help feeling waifish at times, cut off by such a distance from my own ones.' At Hampstead during most of March a sharp chest attack kept him indoors. This was followed by influenza in April, which sent him and his family to recuperate at Shere.

Among our English counties Nicoll lost his heart to Surrey. It was in 1890 that he first took a cottage in the beautiful Surrey village of Shere, which ' Claudius Clear ' described in his letters as Deira. He used to say, ' Shere is the only place I ever loved, except Aberdeen.' Here, he wrote, ' I can walk in half an hour to the point where the fairest of all landscapes is spread before me. Then there are on every side liberal, abundant moors, lovely lanes, deep woods, quiet, quaint villages, and other features innumerable which gladden you at every turn. However jaded and nervous on coming down, I am sleeping well, full of charity, and perfectly peaceful in thirty hours. The restfulness, the charm of the place, sink into one. Deira is so lovely that London is dull in comparison.'

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

Anchor Cottage, Shere, Guildford, *April* 25, 1891.

Shere is my favourite place in all Surrey. I often think of buying or building a small cottage. It is so perfectly beautiful, has fair fishing, is quite out of the world, and we have a donkey which goes well when you burn cinnamon before his nose, beat a tin, and send a little boy before with a brown biscuit. There is also belonging to the house a fine Persian

cat. He was unwell and depressed during the winter, whereupon a village Sage hit on the magnificent idea of giving him chlorodyne. . . . This seemed to do him good and he took it with relish, but as he sleeps now 22 hours out of the 24 it is conjectured that he cannot get it out of his system.

Barrie will succeed and that soon. He is one of the men—more numerous, I fancy, than we think—who are every way improved by success—softened, humbled, and redeemed from cynicism, and I do not know any man of letters with such a future. My admiration for him constantly rises.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

27 Paternoster Row, E.C. [*early in July*, 1891].

Week after week, month after month, I have been proposing to send you a treatise in the form of a letter—an epistle compared with which Hebrews would be a thimbleful, containing all the gathered stores of news and wisdom (!) which I have accumulated for the last six months. But I have been waiting for the mood, and the mood has never come. The fact is, I thoroughly overworked myself with the two biographies [Macdonell and Elmslie] last winter, and have not recovered it. Whenever I got out my paper, I had to begin writing the memoirs, which took me the Thursday and Friday of each week. Then on Saturday I had to begin my paper again, and so it went on till I contracted an absolute loathing of pen and ink, and wrote nothing which was not absolutely compulsory. This has led not only to the total collapse of my correspondence but also to my having declined some jobs that would have been profitable to me. No doubt I shall get over it, but there is no sign as yet. It is not that I feel ill, but always tired and do my work with an effort. On this day week we go to Dieppe, where we have taken lodgings for a fortnight at least. We are taking the children and nurse, and I hope we shall get good weather.

We expect to be at home all August and if necessary all September, and my object in writing to you is to fix you and Mrs. M'Robbie for a visit if possible in August, if not in September. I shall never forgive you if you do not come, and if you can bring the children you can imagine what rejoicings there will be. I have more to say than ever—an inestimable and delightful combination of news and heents—though I cannot write and am longing for walks with you over our beautiful Heath. You are too much at home, my dear friend. The monotony of life needs to be relieved, and you must now make up your mind to move about more freely. Call a Privy Council at once, send me a favourable (and unanimous) Bulletin, and we shall make ready the Best Bedroom and slay fatlings. Do bring Mrs. M'Robbie and the children if you can.

This invitation was accepted, and Mr. and Mrs. M'Robbie enjoyed a very happy visit to Bay Tree Lodge.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead [*Autumn*, 1891].

I agree with you that 'The Little Minister' is wildly improbable, but is it not a rich book, with many pretty little things about it? There is much heart in it too.[1]

At Lumsden Old Manse in the October of 1891 the Rev. Harry Nicoll died, in his eightieth year. He had spent the last few years of his life free from pastoral responsibilities, preaching occasionally, and still eagerly happy in buying and reading books. 'The mingled hope and awe which seemed to make up his religion were always in evidence. Reverence above everything characterized him. When told that he was dying, all he said was, "It is a solemn thing." He

[1] The autograph MS. of this novel was presented by Barrie to Nicoll, who prized it as a precious possession.

Bay Tree Lodge, Frognal, Hampstead

In the Library at Bay Tree Lodge

joined in repeating the twenty-third Psalm, and said no more. Like Macleod Campbell, "He spoke not much about religion when dying. His silent death was like his life—an amen to God's will." [1]

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

27 Paternoster Row, *Oct.* 28, 1891.

My father died very peacefully, with that reluctance which is pleasant to think of—as showing his keen enjoyment of life and nothing more. The Old Manse belongs to my sister [2] and me, and we are to keep it as a summer place for the children and leave the library intact, as I know he would have wished.

[1] 'My Father,' by W. Robertson Nicoll, p. 101.
[2] Mrs. Logan, of Kelso.

## CHAPTER X

### THE *BOOKMAN*

In the autumn of 1891, Nicoll launched a fresh venture. The project of a sixpenny literary monthly had been simmering in his mind for years. As early as January 1887—less than three months after the *British Weekly* began—he wrote to Dr. Marcus Dods : 'I have an idea of a magazine which I may carry out yet. I would call it something like this—*The Bookman : a Magazine for Bookreaders, Bookbuyers, and Booksellers.* I would give in each number a certain amount of popular matter—such as lives and portraits of living authors—gossip—literary anecdotes—advice to aspirants, etc. Then I would give a complete classified list of all publications of the month. Each class would be under a special co-editor with me, who would briefly characterize in a line or two all the good books, warn against pretensions and ignore rubbish. Other departments might be added. Sixpence would be the price, and 2000 would pay if we got three pages of advertisements. My experience is that there is a great class of literary aspirants whose wants are met in no way. Then a great many like to know about books and to be guided, but they don't wish it more than once a month, and they can't wade through reviews like the *Athenaeum* and *Academy*. Who can read a complete number of either ? Then booksellers get no guidance in the *Bookseller*, etc. I could easily get co-editors, and would like it very well.'

After his scheme began at length to take practical shape, Nicoll wrote again on May 21, 1891, to the same sagacious confidant and counsellor : 'I may tell you that the title I hankered after for *The Bookman* was *The New Grub Street Journal*, but it was forcibly

represented to me that I should never get booksellers to give advertisements.'

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

27 Paternoster Row, E.C., *Aug.* 26, 1891.

I have got a very fair list, I think, for the *Bookman* prospectus, and I could have got more if I had tried, but I only wanted those I like. Among them are Dowden, Pater, and Minto, who will all be in the first or second number. Though I have had one or two sharp disappointments, I hope to make a fair first number. One of the features will be a map of Hardy's 'Wessex,' with his and the real names of places. This he has supplied. I have seen a good deal of Hardy lately and am much taken by him. He is certainly the most winning literary man I have ever met—shy and silent in company, but in private remarkably communicative and interesting. He used to be a fiery Evangelical—now he thinks Christianity utterly dead, save for surviving moral fragments. He is bitter upon Drummond, whom he takes to be as great an unbeliever as himself. His literary tastes are curious. He is a great reader of J. A. Symonds. Like myself, he much admires George Gissing.

Shere, Surrey [*September*, 1891].

I have by twelve hours' work a day steady for a fortnight got the *Bookman* into shape, though the first number will not be what I hope to make it. Still, now that the compilation of lists, etc., is done, I wait the event serenely. How much of my time I spend in Mause Headrigg's mood : 'By the help of the Lord I have even luppen over a wall.' I should like this put on my tombstone.

The first number of the *Bookman*, for October, saw the light on September 25, 1891. Among its prominent features were a frontispiece portrait of Tennyson (who died a fortnight later), a review of William Watson's 'Wordsworth's Grave, and Other Poems,' as well as

articles on 'The Carlyles and a Segment of their Circle,' 'Burton at Damascus,' 'Thomas Hardy's Wessex' (with a map), and 'The Work of Rudyard Kipling.' No fewer than eight pages of pithy News Notes bore witness to the editor's wonderful wealth of knowledge. At that time it was far from common to print reliable business information about the publishing and bookselling trades. Another novelty was the literary advice offered *gratis* to inexperienced writers.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

27 Paternoster Row, E.C., *Sept.* 28, 1891.

The *Bookman* has been a great success. We sold the first day 6000 copies, now we have only 100 copies left of the whole large edition [of 10,000], and we hope to print another edition.[1] This does not guarantee the second number, but gives a fair chance. The press notices too have been numerous and generally friendly. The only adverse criticism of which I recognise the justice is that two or three articles are too long. But I wanted not to make it too snippety.

I was rather astonished about the *Expositor*. The circulation has maintained itself with the utmost steadiness. If there is any difference, it is that more of it sells in volumes rather than numbers. It is a continual source of amazement to me that it does not diminish. When the last series was offered cheap, we sold 1500 sets (= 15,000 volumes) in a month or so. The vast majority of our readers are Episcopalians.

Hampstead, *Nov.* 15, 1891.

First, let me thank you for what you say of the *Bookman*. It is the right word. I am well assured that nothing but the utmost pains will establish it, and that too much must not be made of the success of the early numbers. Still, there is something

[1] This second edition (of 5000) had to be followed by a third.

wonderful in the steady demand for them, and I cannot but think they prove that I was right in imagining that there was a public for the kind of thing.

I am totally unfit mentally and physically for the management of a daily paper. No ; I will stick to my work. Something has been done in the [last] five years ; if I get ten years more of working time, I hope to do more. My head is full of plans, and some of them are even in my heart.

Looking through the files of the *Bookman* it is striking to note how many distinguished men of letters have contributed to its pages, and how many who are now famous found an outlet there before they had become widely known. During the first ten years of its existence, the *Bookman* printed articles, reviews, or poems by Thomas Hardy, Mark Rutherford, W. B. Yeats, G. K. Chesterton, William Watson, I. Zangwill, T. J. Wise, Richard Le Gallienne, A. C. Benson, Robert Buchanan, Philip James Bailey, A. T. Quiller-Couch, Jane Barlow, Walter Pater, Barry Pain, W. E. H. Lecky, J. A. Spender, Professor Tyndall, L. F. Austin, Beatrice Harraden, Katherine Tynan, Coulson Kernahan, Andrew Lang, Ernest Rhys, Pett Ridge, Arthur Symons, J. St. Loe Strachey, Professor W. P. Ker, Gerald Massey, Richard Garnett, Professor Edward Dowden, Frederick Greenwood, Harold Frederic, Fiona Macleod, Alice Meynell, Mrs. Thackeray Ritchie, S. Baring Gould, Walter Besant, J. M. Barrie, S. R. Crockett, Oscar Browning, Conan Doyle, William Archer, A. E. W. Mason, Mary Cholmondeley, May Sinclair, E. V. Lucas, Mrs. W. K. Clifford, Gertrude Atherton, Elizabeth Robins, A. C. Swinburne, Theodore Watts-Dunton, Stephen Gwynn, James Douglas, Thomas Seccombe, Lionel Johnson, Professor George Saintsbury. Could any other literary magazine of our generation exhibit a more brilliant and more catholic array of contributors ? [1]

[1] These names are selected from a longer list compiled by Mr. W. M. Parker.

Nicoll had some excuse for pride in that he, alone among London editors, created a purely literary periodical which proved a commercial success. The ground has been strewn with failures. *Literature* flashed in the pan. The *Academy* died a lingering death. The *Athenaeum's* long and illustrious career ended by its absorption into a Liberal weekly journal. The *Bookman*, however, has not only lived but flourished right on to the present day. Its editor secured a succession of able assistants. Its monthly pages were soon enriched and illuminated by copious and admirable illustrations. The magazine still appeals to a wide circle of readers, many of whom lack the leisure or the specialist knowledge required for the *Times Literary Supplement*.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C. [*early December*, 1891].

We had the great pleasure of seeing Alexander Whyte once more this week. I was glad to see when he stood in the pulpit that he had got through the years without much trouble : he is whiter, but his face was soft and rosy—less wrinkled and furrowed, I think, than it used to be. He and his wife came up [to Bay Tree Lodge] on Monday, and I thought the same of her. He is very eager for a colleague ; I told him that Denney was the true successor of Rainy—a subject on which I am willing to bet a four-shilling piece and an apple. As to his being a colleague to Whyte—that is another matter.

Whyte's sermon was curiously null—a series of quotations from the Fathers not very well selected, with complimentary remarks on each as if he had been proposing their health, and a few fervidly vague sentences at the beginning and the end. But a speech he gave at a dinner on Tuesday was as good as anything I have heard him do—full of fire, wisdom and kindliness.

Do you know the Woman who has to husband Dr. X ? She is determined that I shall puff a thing

of hers called 'Portents.' I was determined not, but am getting demoralized. I had had a copy of the work sent for three successive weeks; then two letters requesting notice, and supposing 'some mistake in the Post Office'; to-day I have a marked review. I *may* hold out another week; then burst into Farrarese. On one occasion I received from this Female in one day Five—5—V—Letters.

I am sorry to see Kuenen's death—a noble man and a great genius.

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD
[*soon after Spurgeon's death on February* 1, 1892].

Your paragraph about Spurgeon really vexed me—and it is the only thing you have ever said, or written, or done, that did vex me or that I thought not worthy of your magnanimity. It also amazed me, for never yet did I hear any one speaking of Spurgeon in that way. I never knew any character that impressed itself so deeply on the whole English people—and he was regarded with a most unaffected respect and trust by men of all creeds and none. Every one knew that he was as straight as an ash. I didn't see much of him personally, but I have heard a lot from those who did, and I believe him to have been as sincere and humble a Christian as has ever lived. I never knew a sign that his immense popularity turned his head. Rather the other way—it made him often very melancholy and depressed. I am sure he was one of those to be the more regarded the more he is known. As to his bigotry—yes, and I had my share of his abuse. But think how slowly the critical light has broken—think what most of us did and said in the days of our darker ignorance—think how incomprehensible it necessarily was to him. As to the weightier matters, he was wiser than the rest: that is, if the New Testament has any serious meaning—and I am inclined to think it has. Of course, I am not setting my critical opinion against yours. But I have read him diligently many years—at one time I would

have allowed you to choose any text, and I would give you an idea of his treatment of it—even now with failing memory I would try. Every Sunday night I spend at least an hour reading him, and there is no devotional writing pleases me so well. He was such a very great mystic that I doubt if we have had his like since Behmen. How thin and superficial even Maclaren and Robertson appear beside him ! Well, of course all this is matter of opinion ; but I can hardly think his character as a great Christian is. I am using great freedom, especially for one who often writes recklessly ; but, dear Dr. Dods, I don't like you contrasting the English Nonconformists and 'all right-thinking persons.' There is a certain connexion between the two classes ; we are not a horde of savages, and have even dim perceptions of right and wrong.

27 Paternoster Row, *March* 28, 1892.

Our winter has been very trying. I will back London for a bad climate against any place in the world. However, there must be spring soon, and we are all going to Shere for Easter and the best is to come.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead [*summer of* 1892].

Here the heat is simply sweltering. There has been nothing like it since we sat in the cellar at Norwood and humbly consumed lemonade. I am writing away in an oven, though everything has been done to keep the room cool. The only tolerable time is the evening.

We like Monro Gibson very much ; his church [St. John's Wood Presbyterian Church] is crammed, and we have not yet got sittings though we have been members six months. Over 100 families are waiting.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

[Enclosing for review 'Thomas Carlyle,' by John Nichol, LL.D. English Men of Letters Series: Macmillan.]

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 26, 1892.

Nichol evades nearly every important question and wants trouncing badly. You will luminously perceive this when I tell you that he has come to live at Hampstead; that he calls himself Dr. Nichol; that telegrams have gone to the wrong Dromio; that both Dromios have expressed themselves on this with burning eloquence; that the terrified Department does not now deliver telegrams with that address. I was here first, and think of getting a Bill on the subject passed, concurrently with Home Rule.

The review by Dr. Dods was by no means unfriendly, and appeared in the *British Weekly* of October 6. But a drastic criticism of the book in question had already been published in the *Bookman* for September.

In the autumn of 1892 the *British Weekly* was again enlarged, a fifth column being added to each page. The editor wrote announcing this change: 'Through the generosity and patience of our readers we have been able to make steady progress, seldom very rapid, but never broken by any period of retrogression. The paper has been three times enlarged, now it will be enlarged for a fourth time, and will take rank with the largest journals of the kind in the world.'

Writing on September 26 to Dr. Marcus Dods on the same subject, Nicoll added characteristically: 'When I think of the difficulties, I wonder at my own boldness in beginning, feeble and almost single-handed, so hard and draining a task. But I do not regret it.'

## CHAPTER XI

### A FRAIL CREATURE

To form any due estimate of what Nicoll achieved, we must never forget how steadily he had to battle against feeble health, how much of his work meant a triumph of the spirit over the infirmities of the flesh. Revealing entries occur again and again in his wife's diary. For example, at the end of September 1892 he was ' in bed with a severe cold and shivering.' On October 5 he ' came home with a very bad chest-cold and caused me great anxiety.' By October 16 he had ' nearly recovered ' from that chest-cold. On Christmas Day he was ' recovering from three weeks' neuralgia in the head. He has far too much to do.' Three days later he went down to Cornwall to spend a week at Fowey with Mr. and Mrs. Quiller-Couch ; ' his neuralgia still bothered him when he left.' Fowey he found a delightful place, and his host and hostess were ' exceedingly kind.' Thence he joined his family at Shere, and returned to Hampstead on January 16, 1893, with ' the neuralgia much relieved.' On February 18 he took a severe chill at church, which brought on pleurisy, and he became very ill, with a temperature of 102 degrees. The doctor pronounced that ' his left lung was acting feebly,' though there was no disease. After he had rallied, his wife took him down to Shere on March 1, returning a week later, when she records that ' he is better but not at all well yet. He looks very feeble often, and feels work a burden.' But towards the end of March they again went to Shere and enjoyed ' three weeks of the finest weather possible.' On July 28 we read that ' he is terribly overwrought with the new *Woman at Home* coming out in October. I think he has plenty to do without another magazine.

Mr. Espinasse says it reminds him of a man in a circus riding on four horses—one at first, and then increasing gradually.' On September 8 they came home from a holiday in Aberdeenshire, where 'the weather was fine, and he did not have his pain in his lung.'

Such records leave the irresistible impression of a frail man, who was always toiling ardently to the utmost limit of his strength,

> A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
> Fretted the pigmy body to decay
> And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.

Just after Christmas 1892, Nicoll, as already mentioned, paid a brief, happy visit to Mr. and Mrs. Quiller-Couch at Fowey. After his return he wrote to his hostess on January 6 from Shere, sending her a sumptuous edition of 'A Window in Thrums,' and adding: 'For Mr. Couch I send "Irish Idylls" and one of my friend Mark Rutherford's books. No literary man wilfully neglecting the latter can be in a state of salvation.'

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *March* 7, 1893.

I have been much distressed by the death of my old friend Professor Minto,[1] one of the best of men. I have got a quantity of letters pleasantly rounded off with hints that I shall soon follow him, but I expect to see some of the writers out nevertheless.

*To Professor Henry Drummond.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, *March* 11, 1893.

I think I am getting better again, but it is rather slow. I had to put in a notice to keep my correspondents patient, and in return I have got a number of letters hinting in no obscure terms my early death. Perhaps I shall outlive some of these athletes.

[1] Who in 1880 had succeeded to Professor Bain's chair at Aberdeen.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

MARGATE, *May* 28, 1893.

Do you think that the great argument for the Roman Church is that she has conserved and recognized sainthood? I wish I had enough knowledge to write something about that. There is something [finer] about the Roman saints than about the Keswick saints in their vestures of Dr. Jaeger's woollen clothing. Who are these that are arrayed in Dr. Jaeger? Plymouth Brethren. Fact.

We are to have a visit next month from Maarten Maartens. His name is Mr. van der Poorten Schwartz, and he is a country laird in Holland. He has taken in for a long time the *B.W.* and, since it began, the *Bookman*, and wrote me a kind letter some time ago with which I was naturally much gratified. Barrie thinks no end of him, and says Maartens is the only one of the younger writers whose books make him despair of doing anything as good.

After the election of 1892, Mr. Gladstone became Prime Minister for the fourth time. In 1893 his second Home Rule Bill secured a majority of 34 in the Commons, but was rejected in the House of Lords by 419 to 41.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD [? *summer* 1893].

My hopes of Gladstone being any good to Scotland, or Wales, or any place else, are very slight. He seems to me the greatest curse of the country, and how many are fallen while he lingers on plotting and scheming!

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, [*July*] 1893.

We must meet once a year. We are growing old and shall soon be dead; and letter-writing to me is more impossible than ever, if that be possible.

I have had a very busy year. In the spring I had an attack of pleurisy after speaking in St. John's Wood Church.[1] It was pretty severe and ran me down considerably. Also it got me into arrears with my work. However, the hot weather had a very good effect on my lung, and I am now pretty well, though much in need of a rest.

We have had Watson of Liverpool with us the last three nights. He is a clever chiel, but he has a great deal to say and won't go to bed till 2 A.M., so that he rather takes it out of one.

[1] The Presbyterian Church in Marlborough Road, N.W., to which Nicoll and his wife now belonged, and of which Dr. Monro Gibson was the minister. Elsewhere he described it as 'a strong and generous church, perhaps the strongest and the most generous in the English Presbyterian Communion.'

## CHAPTER XII

### THE *WOMAN AT HOME*

About the time when Nicoll came up to London in 1886, a blight appeared to have fallen on English monthly magazines. Even among old-established monthlies few could show real vitality, and several which once had large sales were in rapid decline. Then, as now, *Blackwood* and *Cornhill* appealed powerfully to educated people, while among a wide constituency *Chambers's Journal* more than held its own. But *Fraser* had succumbed, and excellent periodicals like the *English Illustrated Magazine* and *Murray's Magazine* were too high-pitched for the general reader. Indeed, there existed a kind of superstition that, in order to be respectable, each number of a periodical must contain a ballast of heavy articles, and that two stories —or three at most—made an ample supply of fiction. Mr. W. T. Stead's *Review of Reviews* was not published until 1890. American magazines, however, like *Scribner's* and *Harper's*, had begun to circulate here in considerable numbers, and their popularity pointed to the direction in which retrieval was possible. It became fairly evident that a new development must take place along the lines of abundant illustrations and more readable matter.[1] This was demonstrated by the amazing success of the *Strand Magazine*, which appeared in 1891 and at once captured public favour. Naturally such a success created many rivals and imitators, and some of these also attained a great circulation.

Nicoll conceived the idea of founding a *Strand Magazine* designed expressly for women. He refused to accept the false doctrine that 'a domestic woman

[1] Part of this paragraph has been condensed from an article which Nicoll wrote in 1913, entitled 'Ten Years of the *Woman at Home*.'

is a woman like a domestic.' So he planned a popular sixpenny monthly which should concern itself first and foremost with domestic life, and be written for women who were married or expected to marry. He came to recognize as well that numbers of the best women now lived independent lives, and that their tastes and needs must also be taken into account. For the *Woman at Home*—whose title was suggested by the title of the *Sunday at Home*[1]—he secured the invaluable help of Mrs. Burnett Smith, already so widely known as 'Annie S. Swan,' and the new periodical had for its sub-title 'Annie S. Swan's Magazine.' Its strength lay in regular contributions from her versatile pen, while as to every detail her experience and advice were always available. Nicoll once described Mrs. Burnett Smith as 'the Scheherazade of modern story-tellers,' who could have averted the doom of her prototype for 5000 nights at least. Month by month one main feature of the *Woman at Home* was two or three pages of wise and sympathetic correspondence conducted by Mrs. Burnett Smith, into which she introduced and maintained an intimate, personal note.

The work of editing fell principally to Miss Jane T. Stoddart, assistant editor of the *British Weekly*, and through her hands all manuscripts passed. Miss Stoddart has since become known by her books on 'The Girlhood of Mary, Queen of Scots,' 'The Life of the Empress Eugénie,' 'The New Socialism,' etc., etc., as one of the most able and accomplished of living women writers—one who can read German and old French as easily as modern English, one who is never caught in a mistake. Moreover, Miss Stoddart was as much interested in the world of domesticity and fashion as the least learned of her sex, and the *Woman at Home* owed a very great debt to her fertility of ideas, steady application, and complete mastery of all the minutiae of journalism.

[1] The *Sunday at Home* was first published in 1854 by the R.T.S. But Dr. Norman Macleod, who founded and edited *Good Words* in 1860, made a new departure in monthly religious magazines. His success was followed by the *Quiver* in 1861, and then by the *Sunday Magazine*, edited by Benjamin Waugh, which appeared in 1864.

Some of the best authors and most skilful artists of the day were enlisted in the new enterprise. The blue and white cover, with its willow-pattern border, was designed by Nicoll's friend, Mr. Horace Morgan. From its start the magazine proved signally successful. Of the first number, which appeared on September 25, 1893, the whole edition of 100,000 copies was sold, and a reprint became necessary.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *July* 29, 1893.

I have been meaning to write to you for some weeks, but have waited in the hope that I might be able to send you a dummy of our new magazine for women, which will be out in September. It is still delayed, which I regret, as I should like you to have seen it. You will not take much interest in it, but I hope it may be popular. It is a kind of female *Strand*, but with a religious tone, though not a Sunday magazine. It is not at all literary, but I will endeavour to have one of the stories each month by a good author. I have myself planned and supervised every detail of the magazine; but after the first three numbers or so I expect to have very little work with it, having good assistance. Hodder & Stoughton seem sanguine about it, and are to spend £1100 advertising the first number. It is the first appeal I have ever made *ad populum*, which makes me feel more doubtful than usual. We must sell 30,000 a month, at any rate. If it is a failure, I shall make no more attempts to catch the masses. The pictures have worried me almost out of my senses, but I daresay all will come right.

Owing to this business I have had no holiday, but have been at it without intermission.

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Oct.* 10, 1893.

I think we have sold more of the *Woman at Home* than ever was sold of any first number since the

*Strand*. The feature has been the great sale in England.

A few of the chief contributions which subsequently appeared in the *Woman at Home* may be noted. One most popular serial was 'Elizabeth Glen, M.B.: Experiences of a Lady Doctor,' by Annie S. Swan. 'Kate Carnegie,' by Ian Maclaren, appeared at the height of that author's fame. It was followed by 'The Woman of Fortune,' by S. R. Crockett; 'Dr. Nikola's Experiment,' by Guy Boothby; 'Feo: A Romance,' and 'Dr. Xavier,' by Max Pemberton; 'The Shadow of a Throne,' by William Le Queux; and 'Fuel of Fire,' by Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler. Mrs. Burnett Smith steadily continued her short stories. Nicoll himself suggested to Mr. Baring Gould the writing of his striking 'Idylls of Dartmoor,' and the author confessed afterwards that he had found more pleasure in writing them than in any literary work he had done. Among the series of biographical articles, two were afterwards published in volume form: a 'Life of Queen Victoria,' by Sarah A. Tooley, and 'Lord Rosebery,' by Jane T. Stoddart. As time went on the contributors of stories to the magazine included Marie Corelli, Sarah Grand, Maarten Maartens, 'Q,' Sir Walter Besant, Barry Pain, W. Pett Ridge, H. G. Wells, Gertrude Atherton, Jerome K. Jerome, Mary E. Wilkins, Marie Connor Leighton, Leonard Merrick, E. V. Lucas, A. E. W. Mason, John Strange Winter, Gene Stratton Porter, Mrs. Baillie Reynolds, Baroness Orczy, Mrs. Florence Barclay, Hugh Walpole, and Charles Garvice

In the autumn of 1893 Nicoll had the good fortune to discover a brilliant new writer. About three years earlier he had corresponded with the Rev. John Watson, whom he then knew only by repute as the extremely popular and successful minister of Sefton Park Presbyterian Church, Liverpool. Nicoll asked for an occasional contribution to the *Expositor*. Watson answered that he was a hard-working preacher and pastor, with no time for learned research. In 1893,

however, Nicoll applied again, and suggested that Watson should write some papers for the *Expositor* on 'The Leading Ideas of Jesus.' The upshot was that Watson came up to Hampstead and stayed at Bay Tree Lodge. The *Expositor* articles were arranged for, and appeared [1] in due course. Nicoll thus described his guest in a letter to Dr. Marcus Dods, dated July 29 :—

'The other week we had here a man you will know, though I never met him before—Watson of Liverpool. I had heard him preach. He is an excellent forensic preacher, not deficient in feeling, in fact I should say much the best preacher among Presbyterian ministers here. He stayed with us three nights and was very pleasant, but somehow I did not take to him so much as I expected : he was too cynical for me. In profile he has a singular look of Chamberlain. Yet this may be a misjudgment, and he is certainly a man quite out of the common. Do you happen to know anything about him ?'

The visit, however, had another result which Nicoll himself afterwards put on record.[2]

'I was so much struck with the racy stories and character-sketches with which Watson regaled us, that I suggested he should make some articles out of them [for the *British Weekly*]. The idea had never struck him, and was at first unwelcome. But I kept on persuading him. I had no success until I was accompanying him to the station, when I pressed the matter on him. Just before he said good-bye he promised to try, and in a few days the first sketch arrived. It was clever, but disappointing. . . . I returned this to Watson, stating objections. He sent a second sketch, also more or less unsatisfactory. Then he sent the first four chapters of what is now known as "The Bonnie Brier Bush," and I knew on reading them that his popularity was assured. The first was published in the *British Weekly* of November 2, 1893, under the

[1] In 1896 these were collected and published in a volume entitled 'The Mind of the Master.'

[2] See 'Ian Maclaren: Life of the Rev. John Watson, D.D.,' by W. Robertson Nicoll, 1908, pp. 165-6.

title "How We carried the News to Whinnie Knowe," by Ian Maclaren. It attracted attention at once, and the impression was deepened as the stories were continued.'

The second sketch, 'Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush,' appeared on November 16, and Ian Maclaren speedily found himself famous. At first not a few readers declared confidently that J. M. Barrie was writing under a new pseudonym, but there was very little mystification about the authorship. Watson's friends recognized the tales, compact of pathos and humour, which they had heard from his lips. The circulation of the *British Weekly* rapidly increased. 'Even the critics had to confess that the articles made them cry, and the power of drawing tears from readers, though many people do not believe it, is one of the rarest given to an author.'

The sketches were published as a volume under the title 'Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush' in October 1894. It was instantly welcomed as very few first books have been welcomed. A quarter of a million copies were sold in this country, and more than half a million in America. After all, such popularity was not so surprising. Charles Reade's recipe for a good novel, as given to David Christie Murray, ran thus: 'Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait.' Ian Maclaren made his readers laugh and made them cry.

His biographer [1] has discussed the general question of sentimentalism in literature, as illustrated by its great modern exemplars, Richardson and Rousseau. Ian Maclaren was a sentimentalist as well as a humorist. And though they differed widely in other respects, he had this much in common with J. M. Barrie and S. R. Crockett, that all three wrote, and wrote sympathetically, on Scottish life and character, and also on Scottish religion. Maclaren and Crockett have often been classed together as members of the Kailyard School. But the characteristics of that school may be traced through William Alexander, author of 'Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk,' back to its real prototype, John

[1] See 'Ian Maclaren,' pp. 174-180.

Galt, whose powerful stories, 'The Entail' and 'The Last of the Lairds,' deserve far warmer and wider recognition than they receive in England.

*To A. T. Quiller-Couch.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD [*before Xmas*, 1893].

I was much interested in your things about Zola; and thought several times of writing you. But I do not agree with you about Vizetelly.[1] I would not condemn Zola for 'The Soil,' but I would object to a literal translation of it being sown broadcast. I would object to selections from a treatise on Medical Jurisprudence being got up cheaply and attractively and sold at the railway stations.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD [*December* 1893].

I am going to visit Maarten Maartens, the Dutch novelist, who has a house at Vevey. He was here in summer and we liked him much. Barrie was to go with me, but I am not sure if he will be able to leave his mother, who has been dangerously ill and is still very weak. Her mind wanders a little, and his being with her quiets her.

It is very generous in you to speak so kindly of my little book ['The Key of the Grave']. Judging from letters, etc., it seems likely to awaken very little response indeed; still, I think it might be helpful to those it was meant for, should they chance to fall on it.

I have read the proof sheets of Mark Rutherford's new book,[2] but do not like it so well as the others. There is, I think, great ethical confusion in it.

Do you not think that the Christian Church will have to face a very determined attempt to alter the

[1] The London publisher who was prosecuted and imprisoned for issuing English translations of Zola's novels.

[2] 'Catharine Furze,' which Nicoll criticized with severity in his leader in the *British Weekly* of January 25, 1894.

law of divorce in a manner Christ would absolutely disallow?

On his way back from Vevey, just before the year ended, Nicoll wrote from Geneva: 'My visit was entirely successful. Nothing could exceed the kindness of Maartens and his wife. But it was impossible for me to write for the *B.W.*, as we had a lot of company and I was hardly alone for a minute. I consider this one of my best trips: nobody could have done more for me than Maartens.'

## CHAPTER XIII

### BEREAVED

In December 1893, Nicoll published a slender volume entitled ' The Key of the Grave.' Its chapters, which had appeared originally as articles in the *British Weekly*, were intended for readers who were ' discovering, by actual experience, what bereavement and death really are.' The author's own mind habitually brooded over Christ's revelation of the world to come. This little book of meditations on our immortal hope he wrote ' for people bearing the burden of a great sorrow.' It seemed afterwards almost prophetic of the great sorrow which was in store for him six months later.

In November 1893 Mrs. Nicoll had undergone an operation, but shortly before Christmas she was able to go down to Shere, with her husband and children. During February and March her health fluctuated, and she spent Easter at home in bed. In May she grew much stronger, and was able to entertain Mr. and Mrs. Quiller-Couch and other visitors at Bay Tree Lodge. But ominous symptoms set in, and her diary for June 1 contains the following entry : ' I am leaving for a private hospital to undergo a grave operation. . . . I do not feel hopeless, for God's love and mercy have preserved me, and surely goodness and mercy will continue and follow all my days. But when I think of the possibility of my not recovering, it is indeed Gethsemane. May God bless and keep my dear ones —and if not here, then above [grant us] a happy reunion. . . . I feel so much for Willie—it is harder for him than for me.' With those words her diary breaks off. The next day she was dead.

Little can be written here of her husband under this heart-shattering blow. His wife was only thirty-

six. A host of friends did homage to her charm, her exalting sweetness of character, her gracious and generous sympathies. But no friends could measure what his loss meant to the man who had to say, 'Oh, the difference to me!' Concerning a like bereavement Mark Rutherford wrote: 'My wife daily heard from me what nobody now can hear, and offered a sympathy which nobody else can give.' Nicoll was left alone, with his two motherless children, and his load of work—and that cup of sacred consolation which he himself had held to so many quivering lips.

*To A. T. Quiller-Couch.*

HAMPSTEAD, *June* 28, 1894.

I was anxious to write before this time, and I should have done so—but you know my trouble. What I was and am specially desirous you should know is that your presence and that of Mrs. Couch gave brightness to her last days. We had no thought, nor had the doctor, of the state of things disclosed when he came after you left. He got the chief specialist in London, and they agreed that the operation was necessary. We knew it was a grave one, but were very hopeful, and you know how it ended. Yet I cannot but feel that, if she had to go, it was better she should go not in pain, not knowing she was to leave us, full of brightness and affection to the last. It would if possible add to my misery that you should think your presence did anything to harm her. The trouble was not of that kind, and I know that she was very happy those days. It is with life and love that I should always wish her dear memory to be associated. All the sixteen years of her married life she was full of sunshine. There was never a more radiant nature, and it was so to the last.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

HAMPSTEAD [*June, or July*, 1894].

Many thanks for your kind words. I have seen from the first that I must bear this pain in silence—

so far as possible—and say nothing save of consolation.

So great a crisis in my life has inevitably led me to consider very earnestly my future course. I cannot as yet see any way of giving up my weekly paper, which is incomparably my most burdensome work—indeed, I might say the only burdensome work. There is no one at present who would take it up—no one, I mean, who could manage it—and after so much labour I should not like to see it perish. It is also my only way of exerting any direct religious influence. But both my health and my mental energies have been so seriously affected that, if I am to go on, I must have large help for a time. You are almost the only person who can effectively help me with leading articles, and I know you will do what you can in this great emergency—great, I mean, for me.

I have not had any bitter or rebellious thought. For these sixteen years and the hope of the future I can never be grateful enough. But I depended so much in every way on my wife that, even if I were stronger and calmer, I should not be able to do what I have been doing.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *July* [9], 1894.

As to the silence of Scripture, do you not think that 'If it were not so, I would have told you' covers a good deal? The principle is, *Christ tells us the worst*—is it not? We must trust Him, even where He is not bound down by black and white.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

Smedley's Hydropathic Establishment,
Matlock [*August*, 1894].

I came here on Tuesday and am going through the treatment. The doctor examined me twice very carefully. He said my pulse was very weak and

vitality very low, but nothing organically wrong. . . . The treatment is for strengthening the nervous system, and there is something or other four times a day. The only effect I see as yet is that my appetite is much better. The food is abundant and well cooked, but all plain things—rice, apples, etc. The people are largely under treatment, and there is an air of invalidism over the place. I should prefer travelling abroad ; but I feel that I have reached a crisis in my life and that I must do my best to recover health of mind and body, so if I see benefit I shall remain another fortnight. If I had only a friend with me I should be happier.

It was a great trial to me to part with the children ; but I felt Lumsden was the place for them, and I could not face the North this year at least. I find that I dare not speak or write more than I can help of my great sorrow. It brings it back so that I get no sleep. The only thing for me is to look to the present and the future.

The cup is mixed for us all, and we do not know when it may be put to our lips ; but if we trust, we will not be forsaken.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead [*October*, 1894].

I am better in health and sleep pretty well. But I have not recovered my spirits, and though I work pretty steadily and write my leader nearly every week, yet I do not feel any real interest in things. I know I should have borne this better, but it was a terrible blow to me. Next month I go to Nice [1] for a short time, hoping that the change will freshen my spirits a little. Nothing seems worth while, but I hope that time will have an effect, and I am anxious to do what I can for the children.

Write when you can, and let me know what you are doing. I feel very dependent on my few friends

[1] In November he stayed at Paris and Nice.

now, but I cannot do much in the way of writing letters.

Friends in London—like Mr. Clement Shorter, Mr. Horace Morgan, and Mr. William Canton—did their utmost to alleviate his solitude. 'In those days towards the close of 1894,' writes Mr. Canton, 'Nicoll was a pale, worn and fragile man ; and the distress of his great bereavement drew us into very close fellowship. Even at that time, however, one could not fail to recognize the alert and eager spirit, the masterful will which overruled his physical weakness.'

## CHAPTER XIV

### AN INTERREGNUM

As the months moved on and his health slowly improved, Nicoll found refuge and relief in his work and his correspondence.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Jan.* 8, 1895.

Crockett did right to resign,[1] whatever happens. When he felt his main interest elsewhere, it was not for his soul's health to keep a pastorate. What he will do and where he will turn 'being let go,' is a serious problem; but I hope for the best.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *April* 12, 1895.

I was pleased reading in the paper that you were Moderator of the Synod, and have no doubt that you are wearing your honours meekly! To-night I am alone. My children are at Shere, and Miss Maclagan[2] has gone for Easter to Berwick. To-morrow I go to Shere for one Sunday, but that is all.

We had here a winter of great severity—I really thought the frost would never break. Now it is

[1] His position as minister of the Free Church at Penicuik, Midlothian. Six months later Nicoll received the following letter from S. R. Crockett, Bank House, Penicuik: 'I am alone here, working hard at "Cleg Kelly" and other things. I meant to get to St. Andrews next week, but fear I must continue, labouring hard—"toiling in rowing" indeed; but quite happy at it—as happy as a bairn making mud-pies. It is just the same thing.'

[2] His late wife's cousin, who was then keeping house for him at Bay Tree Lodge.

good weather and there are many signs of spring. It is trying for me to see the anniversary [of his wife's death] come round, and yet I am thankful, deeply thankful, that the time has passed. On the whole I get on better, but have intervals of black depression. As to the future, I do not see anything clearly.

. . . Don't you feel very old—as if your life was largely behind you? I do, and yet it isn't quite a reasonable feeling.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *May* 4, 1895.

I am very busy indeed, and hope to get the first volume of my book out in October. The title is 'Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century,' and I think it may run to six volumes. It will not be a history but a useful collection of [documents] to scan for a history.

Students of English eighteenth-century literature have delved into that vast storehouse of facts and gossip about authors, publishers, and printers which is known as 'Nichols' Literary Anecdotes,' 1812-15. Its additional volumes, issued 1817-58, bear the name of 'Illustrations,' and the stupendous whole extends to seventeen huge octavos, comprising nearly 14,000 pages. In preparing 'Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century: Contributions towards a Literary History of the Period,' Nicoll collaborated with Mr. T. J. Wise, who has unrivalled knowledge of the lives of modern English writers, while his famous library of their autograph MSS. is the wonder and envy of other collectors. For this joint work Mr. Wise provided most of the materials and notes, while Nicoll wrote the introductions.

Only two volumes were published. Vol. I., issued in 1895, contained a full account from MS. sources of William Blake's trial and acquittal for sedition at Chichester Assizes in 1804. It printed two unpublished letters from A. H. Hallam, drawing Leigh Hunt's

attention to Tennyson's earliest poems; and 'A Bundle of Letters' (ten in all) from Shelley to Leigh Hunt. It also contained E. B. Browning's Opinion of Tennyson, as she originally wrote it in 1844. More than one-third of the volume was occupied by 'Materials for a Bibliography of the Writings of Robert Browning.'

Vol. II., which appeared in 1896, included a correspondence between John Ruskin and F. D. Maurice; a Fairy Tale written by Charlotte Brontë at the age of fourteen; an Essay on Carlyle by E. B. Browning, together with letters explaining her own religious opinions; two unpublished Poetical Epistles by Crabbe; a study of Tennyson's Idylls, with other Tennysoniana; and 'A Contribution to the Bibliography of Swinburne.'

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 21, 1895.

I have at last got my book through the press. . . . The verification of dates in my 'Anecdotes' has made me almost blind.

I feel more convinced than ever that the connection between Church and State is wholly and to the roots un-Christian and anti-Christian.

The relevance of this last sentence will become clearer when we recall the political situation. In November 1894 the London School Board Election had given rise to a fierce contest between the ecclesiastics led by Mr. Diggle and Mr. Athelstan Riley, and the Progressives, whose fugleman was Dr. Clifford. The *British Weekly* had urged that to guard the elementary schools from ecclesiastical dominance was vital for the cause of religious freedom, and the election ended in a striking victory for the Progressives.

Then in March 1895 Nicoll lost one of his most distinguished and valued friends by the death of Dr. R. W. Dale of Birmingham. In his memorial article he declared that no Free Church leader had

' done a greater or more enduring work than our high Star and true Apostle that is gone.'

During that spring Mr. Asquith introduced into the House of Commons a Government Bill to disestablish the Church in Wales. But in June Lord Rosebery resigned, and a General Election followed in July, when the Unionists secured a crushing majority of 152 in favour of Lord Salisbury's fourth administration. After this defeat there followed sharp disputes as to the Liberal leadership, and Lord Rosebery was bitterly assailed. The *British Weekly*, however, continued to support him as decisively superior to any rival in the field.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Christmas Day*, 1895.

We have had great sales for books this year—the best that has ever been. I have toiled like a slave all the time, and I think it was the best, for I feel in a more healthy state than this time last year. It is a great thing to have done with another year, and much more can hardly be expected from me.

My little holiday at Cannes was very pleasant on the whole. It was most curious to meet so many people whose whole thought was how to kill the time, and whom a little wind or a few drops of rain made as insurgent as Thomas Hardy. But I felt no envy.

To illustrate what Nicoll meant by toiling like a slave, we may quote the following letter to his daughter Constance, written from Brighton, apparently during 1895 :—

Last week I got through an extraordinary amount of work. I began on Monday by writing Shorter's things. Then I wrote nearly all the *Bookman* news notes, nine columns, and three articles for the *Bookman*, amounting to about seven columns more —in all sixteen columns. Besides, I wrote the leader for the *B.W.*, two columns of ' Claudius Clear,' and

a great deal more. As my assistant was away, I had to be at Paternoster Row on Monday. You may imagine how put to it I was when I tell you that I got up at six on Tuesday morning to write my 'Claudius' and finished it before breakfast. This made me unspeakably tired, but I have managed to come here. You see I have no news: I have done nothing but labour.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

27 Paternoster Row, London, *Dec.* 27, 1895.

I am quite satisfied with the reception of the 'Anecdotes.' There was a thoroughly intelligent review in the *Chronicle* yesterday, and we appear to have sold about 600 copies. I was quite prepared for the complaint that the contents are not readable by the general public; they never were intended to be so. But the next volume will contain much more of a generally interesting kind. As to the History [of Victorian Literature], I still cherish the hope of writing part of it; theology, poetry, and perhaps fiction, in separate volumes. But the time passes and one does not know. I rather feel aggrieved at the way in which you and others evidently think that I have unlimited leisure to write anything. You have no conception of the amount of time and energy involved in superintending periodicals, and in being practically responsible for the whole book issue of a large firm. I grant that there is exceedingly little to show for it, but this I know that from day to day I am constantly occupied. My conscience quite absolves me from the sin of idleness, and I feel convinced that I am doing the best I can. It is not as if I had great knowledge, or great gifts of writing, or the power to produce anything permanent.

There are two books I should like to write within the next four or five years—one entitled 'The Ground Secrets of Christianity,' in which I should

like to express the primary truths and correlate them with the literature of to-day. Theology in the true sense will die out unless it finds a contemporary expression, and I think there is a great deal that might be said. Also I should like to write a book on 'Church and State.' It would be mainly on the lines of Vinet, but would deal with the present phases of the subject and especially with socialism. It would be much better if you, or some one else better equipped than I, would do these books ; but even if they are poorly done, they will be of some help.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, [? *spring*] 1896.

I am grateful to you for what you say about the *B.W.*, though no one can possibly have such an intense sense of its shortcomings as I have. How often I wish to be done with it, and yet I know quite well I should be more miserable out of the yoke. I shall never change my sphere of work. I could not fall into any regular ways, and must be allowed to do as I am doing if I work at all.

At the Free Church Congress which met at Nottingham in March 1896, Nicoll read an illuminating paper on 'The Church and the Press.' He made this confession : 'Any man who undertakes a new religious paper adds ten years to his age. The anxieties of the beginning are overwhelming, and it costs so much to secure a hearing that patience and capital alike are sometimes exhausted just when the tide is about to turn.' He suggested that the Congress should prepare a Free Church Catechism, and he also mooted his favourite idea of a popular weekly *Spectator*, to be sold for a penny.

It may be noted that two months later, on May 4, appeared the first number of the *Daily Mail*.

*From Maarten Maartens.*

CHATEAU DE ZUYLESTEIN, PAR LEERSUM, HOLLAND, *May* 4, 1896.

[The Jameson Raid had occurred at the end of 1895, and Maartens sympathized unreservedly with the Boers.]

Your letter reached me this morning, and it has done me a lot of good. You are one of the kindest-hearted men on earth. I first discovered that at Bex, and have gone on realizing it ever since. Will you agree, please, to accept, once for all, the assurance that you will never offend me? I am touchy enough, Heaven knows, with people I don't trust. But once I know a man wants to be good to me I *never* take offence, whatever I might happen not to comprehend.

In June, Nicoll delivered an address at the close of the session in Hackney Theological College, Finchley Road, N.W. This address on 'The Value of Peculiar Possessions' was included in his volume 'The Return to the Cross.'

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

DEVONSHIRE CLUB, ST. JAMES'S, S.W., *June* 17, 1896.

I notice with much interest and sympathy what you say about your poor people. I feel it to be a real loss that nowadays I only meet with educated people—many of them too much educated.

This lady, who eleven months later became his wife, was one of the daughters of Mr. Joseph Pollard, J.P., of Highdown,[1] a picturesque Tudor manor house near Hitchin. Mr. Pollard himself was a Churchman whose simplicity and dignity of character and charm of manner reflected his deep Christian faith. He had

[1] Nicoll was first introduced to the family at Highdown by his friend Dr. William Wright, of the Bible Society. In that institution Mr. Pollard took the keenest practical interest, serving for many years on its Committee, and becoming in 1907 one of its Vice-Presidents.

been born in the Society of Friends, and Miss Catherine Pollard sat for the figure of the bride in Percy Bigland's well-known picture, 'A Quaker Wedding.' Her own water-colour drawings illustrated a volume of Egyptian travel, 'The Land of the Monuments,' written by her father, and published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

BATH CLUB, DOVER STREET, W., *July* 8, 1896.

What I feel about bereavement is that sometimes one is not sorry for those who go, because they have had a hard lot in life and one can easily see that the change is 'far better.' But often when people are very happy and very useful and very much loved, it is hard not to feel sorry. After all, there are experiences in this life which cannot come in the next, and one longs they should have them. But such questions are naked swords, and we cannot wisely handle them. Only I do think that in time there comes a solemn sense of reconciliation, and we say from the very heart 'Not my will, but Thine be done.'

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Aug.* 10, 1896.

I do not quite know how to tell you what views I hold. But I am going to send you to-morrow two books of mine, 'Ten-Minute Sermons' and 'The Key of the Grave.' Both have been successful, each is in its third edition, and I think I have put the inmost of my heart into them. The second is too sad for you to read; but I think you might read a chapter of the first now and then at your devotions, and perhaps you will tell me if you like it. I have written several religious books—I will tell you the names:—

'Calls to Christ.'

'The Incarnate Saviour: A Life of Jesus Christ.'

'The Lamb of God.'
'The Key of the Grave.'
'Ten-Minute Sermons.'

In October will come out 'When the Worst Comes to the Worst.' So you see I have given my testimony as well as I could. Of my first little book I tried to get a copy for you: but it is quite out of print, and I have not got one myself. But sometimes I feel I cannot speak or write much about religion. It is so great, so wonderful, so overwhelming that silence seems better than speech.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

BATH CLUB, DOVER STREET, W., *Aug.* 26, 1896.

I have had a pretty dismal time, but my country minister from Scotland did his best to entertain me. I gave him three new experiences: (1) 'Charley's Aunt'; (2) a Turkish bath; (3) champagne. 'Charley's Aunt' is now execrably played, the actors being quite demoralized, but one can still raise a few smiles out of it. He listened with solemn fixed attention. Next day he said, 'Was Charley's Aunt a man?' This was the result of twenty-four hours' meditation. He liked the Turkish bath immensely, and said he had never been so refreshed. As to the champagne he said, 'I never did care for lemonade and those sweet things.' It was an excellent brand. When we got home I gave him some Scotch whiskey, which pleased him much better. Next day I took him to Windsor and we had a row on the Thames, which he liked. He went away in high good humour.

What do you think? I have been asked to give a course of lectures in America! Of course I have respectfully declined. It would be dreadful to be harassed in this way in a strange country, and I know I should be so very tired with the journeys.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 1896.

I went over as usual to Mr. Canton's [1] at Highgate on Saturday night, and spent a pleasant evening discussing all sorts of subjects. He is one of my friends whose conversation I most enjoy. His sympathies are wide, and he can take an interest in others than himself—which is so very rare.

In the autumn of 1896 Nicoll arranged to cross the Atlantic in company with his friend J. M. Barrie. They sailed from Liverpool by the *Campania* on September 26, and spent six weeks in the United States.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, [*September*] 1896.

I wanted to write earlier, but I have been oppressed. This is the busiest time of the year owing to the book season, and the additions and anticipations owing to my trip [to America] have made it altogether unbearable. At the end of the day I have often lain down on the rug in sheer weariness and hardly been able to get up again. The worst of it is that there is so little to show for it all—so much time and energy is fretted away upon mere details. But now I think the worst is over and that I may leave with a fairly quiet mind. If I can satisfy myself that I have done my best, I do not fret much.

I have read Bruce [2] carefully. It is racy, almost jaunty at times, but I should doubt if it was masterly as pure exegesis. One has nothing of the feeling with which one reads Lightfoot. It is fresh and occasionally bright, and Brucianism—which is at least as distinctive a thing as Zwinglianism—appears

[1] Mr. William Canton, the author and poet, was at that time sub-editor of the *Contemporary Review*, and manager of Isbister & Co. Two years later he published 'A Child's Book of Saints.'

[2] Professor A. B. Bruce's edition of the Synoptic Gospels in the 'Expositor's Greek Testament,' vol. i.

everywhere. This is very well, but the New Testament is not a Brucian book at all, but a Catholic book. I never feel that Bruce deals in a really *scientific* way with matters of scholarship. On some points he takes a curious line, *e.g.* the virginity of Mary and the prohibition of divorce. The introductory matter is good and clear—not excellent. The critical notes on readings have a perfunctory look on the whole. Still it will be the best thing available, but I doubt if you will go mad over it. His energy and affluence of ideas down to a certain depth are amazing.

I have been up at Liverpool bidding Watson [1] good-bye. He is a wonderful man—has made eighty engagements to lecture, preach, and speak in a space of ninety days, with constant travelling between. It would be the death of most people.

To my mind the best of the books this year is Barrie's on his mother [' Margaret Ogilvy ']. It is extremely quiet and may be missed for the moment, but I have never seen anything of the kind so good. ' Sentimental Tommy ' is full of work and talent and genius, but it does not seem to me to move with steady accelerating force to its end, which is the great thing. But the two books together should put him miles ahead of all the other younger authors. . . . I think this trip may do us both some good.

[1] Ian Maclaren had undertaken a tour in the United States.

## CHAPTER XV

### IN THE STATES

NICOLL's experiences in America are described in the following letters written to Miss Catherine Pollard. Their engagement was announced in the spring of 1897.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

HOLLAND HOUSE, NEW YORK, *Oct.* 6, 1896.

It seems a year since we arrived here, and I can only tell you a tenth part of its history. Well, we got up for breakfast at six on Saturday morning and were in New York harbour. It was eight before we landed. A number of friends were waiting for us, and a host of interviewers--for Mr. Barrie mainly. Then we had two hours to wait at the Custom House. This was very wearisome indeed. But at last we got away to our hotel, which we reached at ten. We were marched off to lunch at the Aldine Club, and spent the afternoon there very agreeably. We returned at five, rested a little, dined, and then went to the theatre. Mr. Frohmann, the manager, put his stage-box at our disposal and we saw 'Rosemary,' which was well acted, especially by the heroine, one of the best young actresses I have seen for some time. We found a telegram from the Aberdeens,[1] asking us to start at once for Ottawa ; but we felt we must have a little quiet. We could not face eighteen hours of continued travel. So we telegraphed we could not come.

[1] Lord Aberdeen was at the time Governor-General of Canada.

New York is a much finer city than I thought—with a very continental look. Fifth Avenue, where we are, is a long and noble street with grand churches. The pavements are rough, and there is much noise. We were much struck by the erect bearing of the American women. This hotel is a fine one, but very dear. I pay £1 a day for my room alone—and living costs 12s. more. Everything here costs at least twice as much as in England.

We found New York very full of Ian Maclaren, whose portrait is everywhere and who is advertised to lecture on big bills with a portrait like a music-hall poster. I saw my own photograph in a window! and Mr. Barrie's in several places.

Well, on Sunday morning I went to church—Dr. John Hall's Presbyterian Church, which is the chief one here. It is a fine building. We had a good old-fashioned sermon on 'We will rejoice in Thy salvation; in the name of our God we will set up our banners.' In the afternoon we had many callers—most of them for Mr. Barrie.

Monday I spent the forenoon at Mr. Dodd's, the publisher, and the rest of the day we were entertained by Mr. Gilder, the editor of the *Century Magazine*, who has a magnificent place. We enjoyed ourselves very much there, and met a lot of nice people who showed us great kindness.

To-day, Tuesday, we have spent on the Hudson. Some friends made up a party for us and we were there from 9 A.M. to 7 P.M. We were at West Point—the great military school of America. The Chief Officer showed us over, and we were entertained at lunch. It is a magnificent sail—much finer than the Rhine. We saw Washington Irving's 'Sleepy Hollow,' Jay Gould's marble mansion, and I don't know what else. It has been a shadowy, cool, pleasant day, and I do not feel very much tired.

Since I came here I have had a great annoyance. I had a lot of cuttings laid out for you from the newspapers—mostly about Mr. Barrie, but some about me. Unfortunately, the chambermaid took

them and burned them. This is annoying, but I will try and get something for you soon. The interviews are nothing at all. Mr. Barrie hates this publicity intensely and will now see no one, so I do not think there will be any more of them.

Now for the plans. We are going on Friday to a place called Northampton to visit Mr. G. W. Cable, the novelist,[1] and to stay with him till Monday. Then I think we will go to Boston and stay about a week. Then to Canada.[2] We will return to New York a week ere sailing, but you will hear more exactly by and by.

I wish you to send to your booksellers for Mr. Cable's book, 'Old Creole Days,' and read it. It will cost you 1s. and is a very fine book, and you will be interested in it for my sake.

To-morrow afternoon I go to a place called Litchfield, three hours from here, to visit friends whom I first met at Cannes. I am to be there till Friday morning, when I join Barrie again. He has engagements of a theatrical kind, so we shall be busy. Things are as nice as possible and we are well, though tired. You cannot imagine the kindness of the Americans. It is overwhelming. We have very little spare time—people always coming.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

The Brunswick, Copley Square, Boston, *Oct.* 14, 1896.

We have been in such a steady stream of occupation that I have never had a minute to myself, and I do not know how I am to give you any idea of my proceedings. But I will do my best. On Wednesday morning I started for Litchfield in Connecticut, to visit my friends the Whites, leaving Barrie in New York. They are very wealthy people, who have a country house there. I met them first at Cannes. The journey was pleasant. When we got

[1] Author of 'Old Creole Days,' 'Dr. Sevier,' 'The Grandissimes,' etc.

[2] Eventually they abandoned the visit to Canada and went to New Orleans and Washington.

*Photo. H. S. Mendelssohn*

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out of New York the houses were all wooden. They are scattered sparsely about as if they had dropped out of the sky. Everything looks rough and unfinished. The red of the maple in the autumn woods is what most catches the eye. The trees are much smaller than with us, but very abundant. The boy White accompanied me from New York, and they met us at the station with a carriage and we drove half a mile. They have a fine wooden house with large rooms, and had several people to meet me. Next day was all planned out and very busy. We went to Litchfield in the morning. It is a hill town of about 2000 inhabitants with lovely wooded scenery all round. We made several calls. Miss Violetta White, who has just finished her education in Paris, went with me. She is a clever and charming girl. We saw some of the quaintest old wooden houses dating from 1760. One fashionable New York lady, who is staying near here, said she was a cousin of mine. She belonged to the clan Robertson, and her grandfather was chief of the clan. I said my grand-uncle claimed to be chief, which pleased her. Then we came back to lunch, where there was a very large party to meet me. You have no idea how the American women talk. It is very clever, but when they get excited their voices grow shrill and it is rather wearisome.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

THE ST. BOTOLPH CLUB, BOSTON, *Oct.* 16, 1896.

I had got thus far last night, when Dr. Putnam came and took us away, and ever since I have been too busy to take up the thread.

Well, the Whites made me read at their party two chapters from 'Margaret Ogilvy,' and they seemed greatly to enjoy it. Afterwards we had a walk. Then after dinner I read again. Next morning I was off at 8 A.M. and reached New York at 11.30. At noon Ian Maclaren and his wife called on me, and I had the pleasure of introducing the two

novelists to each other. Wasn't it funny that I, who introduced both to the public, should introduce them to each other—and of all places, in New York! Ian looked very fat and flourishing. He is a great success in America. Then we made a call, had lunch, and at 4 started for Northampton in Massachusetts, the home of Mr. G. W. Cable of whom I wrote to you. We reached there at 8.30—tired enough.

We had a wonderful visit at Northampton, and I despair of telling you about it. Imagine a town of white wooden houses, set well apart, and of about 20,000 inhabitants. It is surrounded by wooded hills. Apple trees are planted all round, and apples lie strewn on the ground. Mr. Cable's house is most interesting. He has a beautiful wife with white hair, about 50, tall and dark-eyed. He is himself slender and gentle, with something of the languor of the south. There is a delightful family, and the whole atmosphere is pleasing. Mr. Cable is a devout Christian—a member of the Congregational Church, which is very strong here. The most prominent institution of the town is a great college for girls called Smith College, and 1000 young ladies are there from all parts of the States. On Saturday we drove in the morning, and in the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Cable gave a reception in our honour at which nearly all the town attended. Mr. Barrie is much read there, and I found that I was not unknown—there being several readers of my papers, etc., there. I was pleased to find the lady-head of the College, a very able woman, a reader of the *British Weekly* and in sympathy with my religious views. This over, we went to the theatre to hear Ada Rehan in 'The School for Scandal,' a play I do not care for. They had a box for us. We were pretty tired at night. I slept in the house of Mr. Van Dyke, Mr. Cable's minister, a very able man and a bachelor, where I was most comfortable.

On Sunday morning we were all at church.

Mr. Van Dyke preached a good sermon on gossip. There were 1000 people present, I should think, including a great many of the young ladies whom we had met. I was struck with the frankness, fearlessness and innocence of the American girls. They are as a rule not prettier than ours, but they are more interesting. The head of the College asked me to address their evening service, which they call Vespers. I did so, and took for a text the verse in the ' May Queen ' which begins

All in the wild March-morning I heard the angels call . . .

There were at least 900 girls present, and I got on nicely, being quite cool. I will perhaps, if I get time, write out the address and send it to the *British Weekly*, where you will read it.[1] Then there was a kind of informal dinner and reception where many were. And I was again tired.

Monday I went to the great Deaf-Mute Institute here, where they teach the deaf to speak and read the lips. It was most wonderful. The Principal, Miss Yale, is a remarkable woman and looks as if she had had a history. She is confident that every one can be much helped by the lip-reading, but says that many fail because they will not take the trouble. She says about six months is necessary for much result—then rapid progress is made. She says the best teacher in England is a lady at Bexley. Monday evening we spent at Mr. Cable's. He sang for us many of the old Creole songs, and did so most charmingly, accompanying himself on the violin. Mr. Barrie gave a capital imitation of Irving.

On Tuesday we started for Boston. It was very, very wet. We arrived at 4, and found invitations for us to a reception at Dr. Putnam's. We went, and found many distinguished people, including Miss Wilkins, Judge Holmes, Dr. Weir Mitchell, several Harvard professors, Mr. Emerson—son of Ralph Waldo Emerson—and many others. Every

[1] This address, entitled 'A Listener unto Death,' was reprinted in Nicoll's volume, 'The Return to the Cross.'

one was most kind, and we had a host of invitations. We arranged to go to Harvard University to-day, to Miss Wilkins' to-morrow and to dine at Justice Holmes' that night, on Friday to Concord, the home of Hawthorne, Emerson, and other famous people.

To-day we went to Harvard. Our friends took us out in carriages, and Professor William James received us. He is the brother of Henry James the novelist, is a pleasant man with a charming wife (such good eyes), and was unspeakably kind. The buildings are large and handsome, but not beautiful. There are 3000 students at the University. Then there was a reception at his house, where we met Charles Eliot Norton, Prof. Thayer, and many other interesting people. I forgot to say that we saw the houses of Longfellow and Lowell. Miss Longfellow is still in her father's house, which is a pleasant home with fine old carved furniture. The Lowell house is closed and looks sad. We have just got home and I am writing this.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

THE ST. BOTOLPH CLUB, BOSTON, *Oct.* 19, 1896.

I like to hear what you are thinking, and was pleased to hear what you said of the poor. I think the same; and I am sure there must be great changes in the social order ere the will of God is done. It cannot be right that some should have so much and others so little. Yet I do not believe in revolutions.

You did quite right not to speak at the Bible Society meeting. I do not care for women speaking at all, unless it is to women. It spoils their sweetness. A woman is infinitely the worse for being half a man. There are plenty of men about.

We have had such a time here—never a moment's peace, but then very much kindness. I do not know where to begin. Did I tell you of our visit to Harvard about fifteen miles from here, the greatest American University? We were the guests of Pro-

fessor James, the brother of Henry James the novelist. The American women are very charming. They are such brilliant talkers, and are well up in books and everything—the intellectual companions of the men. They are, however, as a rule not pretty and they age very soon.

Then we went to Randolph, a village about twenty miles from here, to see Miss Mary Wilkins the novelist,[1] whom we had met in Boston before. She was staying at a homely farm-house. She is plump and soft and gentle—just like a duck. Mr. Barrie said he was always wondering when she would take to the water. She was very shy with Mr. Barrie, and he with her, but she chatted freely with me. Did I give you a bit of our talk at our first meeting?

Miss W. Did you think from my portraits that I weighed 200 pounds?

I. No, indeed.

Miss W. Well, I don't, then. And you don't look like what I fancied.

I. No: what did you fancy?

Miss W. I fancied you were a big stout serious man, with a long red beard.

You must know that I was the first to introduce her books to the English public.

Well, then we had a day in Concord, the home of Emerson. His son, Dr. Emerson, received us and showed us round, which was most interesting. Old Miss Emerson still lives in her father's house, and she showed us his library.[2] Miss Emerson is deaf, but has learned lip-reading and gets on wonderfully. This was one of our best days. We also went to Salem, famous as the birthplace of Hawthorne and as the scene of the witchcraft trials—a forlorn old

[1] Author of 'A Humble Romance,' 'A Far Away Melody,' 'A New England Nun,' 'Cinnamon Roses,' etc. This last title Nicoll himself suggested.

[2] Elsewhere Nicoll wrote: 'No spot in America seemed to me quite so sacred as that quiet study, from which so many ennobling and purifying impulses and influences went forth through the world. It was just as it used to be through the days of that long and innocent life. There are, as I should have expected, comparatively few books . . . the number of volumes does not exceed 2000, or at the very most 3000.'

town. Also we have been at many receptions and dinners, including a beautiful dinner at Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes', the son of the famous writer. He lives in his father's house, a very fine one, and is the handsomest man we have seen in America. I did my best at the receptions to be agreeable, and I think partly succeeded. One of our hostesses was overheard to say in the hall, 'Mr. Barrie is very quiet, but Dr. Nicoll is a most delightful man.'

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

THE NEW ST. CHARLES, NEW ORLEANS,
*Oct.* 28, 1896.

New Orleans is a fine old French city, but the damp steaming heat is awful and destroys one's nerves and fibres. I can scarcely hold a pen just now. Thank God, to-night we turn homewards, going to Washington where we arrive on Friday morning. Then to New York, and we sail on November 7. Oh, to be home! We have done very well, have got on splendidly together, have met with unbounded kindness, but I am so home-sick! Never, never again shall I be separated so long and so far from my dear ones. Nothing is worth it.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

THE CENTURY ASSOCIATION, NEW YORK,
*Tuesday*, 6 *p.m.*, *Nov.* 3, 1896.

This is an awful country to write letters in. For one thing, so much time is spent in the trains. For another, there is a constant stream of callers. You never saw anything in the least like it, and at night one is so thoroughly weary that one cannot guide a pen. New Orleans is such a fearfully unhealthy place that we are both thankful to have got away without fever. Open sewers, water everywhere, a damp clammy hot climate—it is terrible. It took

us two nights and a day to get to Washington. Some parts of the country, notably Kentucky, are pretty. We had a state room and slept pretty well by help of sulphonal. Washington is a fine quiet clean town with wide streets—a paradise for bicyclists. (By the way, I would like you to learn the bicycle. I am going to learn, and we would have journeys together with the children.) We were quiet there, but went to Mr. Nelson Page, an author who has married recently a very rich widow. He lives in great style, and has a silver tea-kettle with balls sticking out which positively shrieks 'How much do you think I cost?' They had a live lord there—Lord Westmeath, a quiet red-haired lord. On Sunday we heard Dr. Talmage preach. I did not like him. His voice is harsh, his language high-flown, and he conveyed no impression of sincerity. But he is a man of some parts.

On Monday we came here, and we have had such a stream of callers. I have seen all, and with my heavy cold upon me it has been a trial. This is Election Day, and there is great excitement. We dine with Mr. Scribner, the publisher, and go with him to the *New York Herald* office to hear the returns.[1] I don't expect to be back till 2 A.M. To-morrow we lunch with some theatrical people, and in the evening dine with Mr. W. D. Howells, the author. Thursday we are entertained by the Aldine Club. There is to be a great gathering of the literary people of America, and we make long speeches. I don't feel nervous, as I know quite well what I want to say. Friday we dine at this club, the Century, which is the grandest in New York, and Saturday morning at 6.30 A.M. we sail. My companion and I have got on *perfectly*—what do you think of that?

The dinner given by the Aldine Club in honour of the two Scottish visitors brought together more than 120 representative American publishers and men of

[1] President M'Kinley was elected by a great majority over Mr. Bryan.

letters. The authors present included W. D. Howells, Henry Van Dyke, G. W. Cable, Charles Dudley Warner, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Thomas Nelson Page. The table was decorated with thistles, furze, and heather, the menu included 'Haggis à la Thrums,' and an official piper marched up and down playing during the feast. 'The man who created Thrums' concluded a brief but pungent speech as follows: 'What impresses me especially about this gathering is to see so many publishers and authors gathered here, all quite friendly. Times have changed since a certain author was executed for murdering his publisher. They say that when the author was on the scaffold he said good-bye to the minister and to the reporters, and then he saw some publishers sitting in the front row below, and to them he did not say good-bye. He said instead, "I 'll see you later." I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for this kindness, and I assure you that I shall never forget it as long as I live.'

This friendly and hospitable farewell formed the happy climax of one prolonged and unbroken welcome. Nicoll confessed in the *Westminster Gazette* after his return: 'I can hardly find words in which to express our appreciation of the courtesy, cordiality, and open-handed generosity with which we were received wherever we went throughout our stay.'

Nicoll reached his home at Hampstead again on November 14.

*To A. T. Quiller-Couch.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Dec.* 3 [1896].

We had a most prosperous tour in America. But it was very little of a rest—in fact, quite otherwise. I have often got more benefit from a week on the Continent than from all this absence. Still, I am very glad I went, though I don't feel as though I should ever want to go again. The sea was not so bad as I expected, but bad enough, though I dare say you might like it.

To my mind 'Margaret Ogilvy' is the best of Barrie's books, but I fancy many will disagree, especially those who do not feel deeply.

*To Miss Catherine Pollard.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Dec.* 14, 1896.

This morning I found some requests to help, and I fell into a curious vein of thinking—perhaps quite wrong—but I am going to tell you of it. It flashed upon me that people were always asking me to do things for them—to give or lend them money—to hear their confidences whether of grief or joy. It occurred to me that all my leisure and much of my money was bestowed on others. And I never in all my life borrowed sixpence from any one, or asked a letter of introduction, or confided my troubles to any outside of my own home. And then I thought it was good that I was able to be of any use—that I had any means or any power however small to be so. But yet I think there is a want in life—the want of some one who would not be always asking, but would sometimes give—who would remember that I had my own sorrows and struggles and failures and despondencies and illnesses, and who would watch for them and give me a steady quiet sympathy and would say, '*I* do not care for you merely when you are prosperous, but when you fail and are down. I care for you all the more, and I am yours to help you.'

*From Maarten Maartens.*

CHATEAU DE ZUYLESTEIN, PAR LEERSUM, HOLLAND, *Dec.* 13, 1896.

I should imagine you were drowned in work, if I did not know that the torrents which would swamp any other man only float you along triumphant. I have never in all my life seen any one who approached you in this respect. I, whose hours contain but 40 minutes, stare open-mouthed. . . . So

I picture you to myself blissfully smoking in an arm-chair, all serene, up to your knees in a deluge of newspapers, out of which you have extracted the quintessence, merely by tearing off the wrappers! Amazing man !

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Christmas*, 1896.

I have been meaning to write you ever since I came back, but have been dreadfully bothered. All sorts of things had been allowed to accumulate and the locker was quite empty ; so ever since, I have been busy from morning till night, or rather to morning again. Last week or two have been particularly trying. This week we had to get out the paper a day earlier ; everything was in frantic confusion ; no proofs could be got, and I have not dared to look at the result. Now I ought to be reading manuscript novels, but whenever I sit down I fall asleep like my big cat, and I must recover energy before I can work.

I look back with much satisfaction to my American trip. At the time it was fatiguing, the Americans having no privacy and the journeys being long. But we had no hitch of any kind from first to last and managed the voyages well. Barrie made the best and kindest of travelling companions, but I was very sorry to find him so very frail. We saw American literary society thoroughly well and received great kindness. Of Church life we saw very little, though I could have done so had there been time. I formed the impression that the nation was suffering from a kind of febrile irritation which led to petulant outbursts not really of deep significance. There is a deal of anxiety amongst the rich people, and the M'Kinley election has certainly not solved the problems of the country. They were wildly sanguine in their expectations, but these have not been realized and I felt sure they would not. The agricultural depression is a much more serious matter there

than even here—the great country so depends on it and it is very, very deep. As to their ways—we thought there was nothing to learn from them, so far as they are different, except that books are far more available owing to the 'ransoms' paid by dead millionaires.

John Watson had an enthusiastic reception. He got the religious public to his entertainments, and they hold back from the stage which is in a miserable condition in America. . . . I feel rather anxious for Watson's literary future, but he may be able to pull himself together if he has the sense to see the hollowness of the American applause. You never saw any one in such a state of exaltation—not even a Moderator's wife.

All the serials have done well, and the *B.W.* constantly gains ground If it didn't, I really think I would drop it, for it ties me terribly and I grow old.

I am very much taken up now with building an additional room to my house for books. By throwing in two little rooms I shall have space to hold 25,000 volumes in bookcases double and standing at right angles to the walls with a passage between. The building commences on January 2, and should be finished on February 15, or so, by the contract.

## CHAPTER XVI

### IN HIS LIBRARY

Perhaps Nicoll never did anything which brought him more personal happiness and comfort than the construction of his library at Bay Tree Lodge. Years afterwards he told the Aberdeen students [1] that no man can have a book-room to his mind unless he designs it himself, and pictured to them the library which Montaigne [2] arranged in one of the turrets of his château in Dordogne. At the beginning of 1897 Nicoll added an upper storey to the wing of his Hampstead house, and when it was finished he had room there for over 24,000 volumes. No visitor to that wonderful chamber will forget its long vista of crowded book-cases projecting on to a floor which also was piled with heaps of books, magazines, and newspapers. Between these a narrow winding rivulet-track of rugs led up to the arm-chair of the owner, dimly seen amid a cloud of tobacco by the fire. You had the uncanny sense of a vampire brain crouching in its corner, having sucked the life-blood of innumerable books and absorbed half the souls of their authors. For Nicoll's memory was preternatural. He knew every scattered volume, and where to lay hands on it, and almost the page on which a needed quotation lurked. There, for a quarter of a century, he read and wrote and brooded and dictated. He could say, with Montaigne, *Je passe là et la plus part des jours de ma vie, et la plus part des heures du jour. . . . C'est là mon siége.* In that sanctuary his friends recall him best, as he sat smoking endless pipes and gossiping for hours in his

[1] Address on 'The Lost Art of Reading' to the Aberdeen University Debating Society, 1903.

[2] *Essais*, iii. 3.

soft, gentle voice and Aberdonian accent—now with guileless air posing some shrewd question—now chuckling over some racy repartee—now peering into the dark mystery of things—now pouring out knowledge from what seemed an inexhaustible store.

He has left a record [1] of what he himself thought about the library he collected, and has told us which were the books he valued most.

'I am writing in a library which at the present moment contains from 23,000 to 25,000 volumes. They are everywhere. The shelves are full and the floor is crowded. There is a lane from the door to the fireplace, a length of fifty-one feet, but it is narrow and is narrowing. The library is only a journalist's library. There are no rare books in the number, and if the whole were sold by auction the results would be disappointing.[2] Nevertheless, to me the collection means something. It has been accumulated in the course of years in obedience to various impulses, and at one time or another almost every volume in it has possessed a certain significance. It contains a few special collections made with the view of writing on certain subjects.

'My weakness, and I may frankly confess it, is a love for those unfortunate beings known as the minor poets. I think I have as many of the volumes of the minor poets of the Victorian period as any other collector. For this I have no excuse ; I have simply satisfied my own tastes and inclinations. Every now and then I have dreams of producing an anthology in which there shall be no piece which has appeared in any other anthology. At other times I think of writing articles about the merits of Alfred Norris, and G. A. Simcox, and J. B. Selkirk, and William Forsyth, and many others. But these are mere excuses. I shall never write the articles, and I shall never compile the

[1] See 'Claudius Clear' on 'Weeding a Library,' in the *British Weekly* of April 29, 1915.

[2] This forecast was fulfilled after his death, when 20,000 of his books were sold by auction for a little over £1000. It must be owned that most of these volumes were in bad condition, dog-eared and interleaved with tobacco ash. Nicoll treated his books simply as tools, to be caught up when he wanted them and then tossed aside.

anthology. So according to all reasonable rules I should part with the larger number of my poetical collection. I shall do so, however, if I must do so, with great regret.

'My theological collection is very numerous. It contains a very large number of what are called standard books. In particular, it is rich in books about the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament and the New. It also contains numerous sermon volumes. I think I could part more easily with most of these volumes than with any others in my library. But there are some I should hold fast. They would be the mystical books. It is wonderful to look through such a collection as mine and to see how religious books with the property of mysticism continue to be fresh when the scholars and the doctors and the priests have passed into oblivion. Whatever may befall, I shall keep with me some volumes of Spurgeon, some volumes of J. M. Neale, all the volumes of Dora Greenwell, and a selection from the English and foreign mystical writers.

'Having intended for many years to write a History of Periodical Literature in the Victorian Era, I have collected a good many books for that end, including sets of forgotten magazines and reviews. I like this kind of reading, though I am not going to say it is the best or the most profitable. If I can accomplish my book it will be of some use to students, giving information that cannot be got without a great deal of dredging. If I do not write the book, I shall have the consolation of spending many hours in preparing for it.

'My biographical collection is tolerably full, numbering at least 5000 volumes. They are well arranged, through the kind care of others, and if I want a book the chances are about five to one that I shall find it. The volumes are in rough alphabetical order, and I think I may say that they have all been read. Many people will think that I have wasted much time, which is no doubt true ; but I have found my account in the reading and do not for one moment regret it. For the

journalist who knows how to use them biographies are a rewarding study.'

With his whole heart Nicoll would have endorsed Dr. Johnson's preference: 'The biographical part of literature is what I love most.' Elsewhere he declared: 'I have for years read every biography I could lay my hands on, and not one has failed to teach me something.' . . . 'Occasionally a biography will give us the key to much from which we have been barred out, or, to change the figure, will throw a flood of light upon what has been obscure. Even if we never have that key, when we come upon something that strangely moves us, we may be sure as a rule that the words and thoughts have been passed through the fires of life. I might even say that in the most ephemeral forms of writing, such as journalism, what is most interesting is what has been part of the writer's experience.' [1]

One extraordinary power which Nicoll possessed was his prodigious speed in reading. Children, to begin with, will spell out a letter at a time, and peasants as they read mentally pronounce one word after another, while educated men come to grasp a sentence at sight. But it seemed as if Nicoll could master a whole paragraph, or even a whole page, in one swift comprehending glance.[2] Mr. Clement Shorter bears witness that 'he could read a page while I read a sentence.' It was not a case of skipping: he took in and remembered the whole content over which he had passed his eyes. Once at Brighton, where they were staying together, Sir Hedley Le Bas came back to their hotel for tea, and Nicoll remarked that he had spent the afternoon in reading a stiff volume, which would take most men a couple of days to master. Sir Hedley accused him of skipping, picked up the book, and began to cross-examine the reader; 'but,' said he, 'I could not catch him in a single wrong answer.'

[1] 'The Art of Life,' pp. 5, 17.

[2] 'Claudius Clear' once wrote in the *British Weekly*: 'I have made various personal experiments and find that I can read, when there is no occasion for halting, about 20,000 words in half an hour.' He added that the majority of persons read an ordinary story at the rate of from 8000 to 9000 words in half an hour. In 1903 he remarked: 'I think I average about two books a day.'

Nicoll lived and moved and had his being in the world of books. Yet they remained his servants, they never became his masters. For he was one of those rare men whom Bagehot described as gaining great stores of knowledge by eager and incessant pursuit, without drudgery or weariness. And so, when he looked back, it was natural for him to witness this good confession : [1]

'Reading has been the chief pleasure of my life. It has given me so much pleasure that I feel that I am in danger of falling into extravagance when I speak of it. The pleasure has gone on increasing, and is stronger now than ever. Of many things we grow weary in the course of years, but nowadays I have a greater happiness in reading than ever I had before, and I am thankful that this is so. For reading is not an expensive nor an unreachable pleasure. It is within the power of all to get the joy of reading, and the independence of reading, for it means a great deal of independence and separation from care. Besides, it is an elevating pleasure if the books are rightly chosen, and ought to brighten and elevate and purify the character. It is always more pleasant to meet with one who is a bookman than with one who is not. I always feel safe and comfortable and happy in the presence of any one who is really fond of reading.'

Twenty-six years after the library was built, Sir J. M. Barrie touched on Nicoll's love for books in a tribute written when his friend lay dead.

'. . . Our attire was the one part of us to which he had a blind eye, unless, indeed, a book protruded from a pocket, balanced by a book in the other pocket. That, I am sure, was, in his opinion, the way in which all young men should set off whistling to seek their fortune ; it was his own way at all times of his life, except that no pockets could have contained all the books he needed for the shortest journey. He carried them "in his oxters" on all occasions, so that often as he walked his arms were extended as if he were about to attempt to fly, and the only valet he needed

[1] 'A Bookman's Letters,' p. 217.

was one who could follow him and pick up the books as they fell ; in protracted travelling he gradually left his clothing behind him in the various hotels, as more and more books crowded them out of his valises. Many will tell of his enormous home library, out of which it seemed to be his ambition to crowd even himself. He never believed there was a sufficiency of books in that vast apartment ; he was, perhaps, the only man in the world who thought that more people should write books ; he considered that the next best thing to a good book was a bad book. He was so fond of books that I am sure he never saw a lonely one without wanting to pat it and give it sixpence. I should say that he read thousands of them every year of his life, and as quickly as you or I may gather blackberries. He had not the slightest interest in science, but would have been interested in it at last if it could have shown him how to treat his eyes so that he could read two books at once ; he grudged two eyes to one book.

'And yet he read a great many more newspapers than books. When he was in America, if it was the books that became his sole luggage, it was the newspapers that necessitated his departure to the next city ; for those papers are great in bulk, and in twenty-four hours they changed the appearance of his room as snow may change a landscape ; no furniture now visible, only a mighty white expanse, out of which you had to dig him.'

*To Dr. James Denney.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, *Jan.* 1, 1897.

I agree with what you say about literature on the whole, but we are in a peculiar position just now. Orthodoxy, partly through the narrowness and ignorance of its defenders, has got to be rather shelved in the minds of literary and reading ministers. There is the idea that we had better get rid of it, and that we shall thus meet the real wants of the

age. As against that, I find in the realism of literature a proof that there is a need in the human mind for what a full Christianity and nothing else can supply. It is true that Lacordaire and Spurgeon stood in a certain sense aloof. But you will admit that both of them were in a sense very modern, that is, they talked the language of the time. They were aware of the tendencies at work, even when most opposed to them. You cannot imagine Spurgeon's sermons preached by a Puritan, or Lacordaire's by Massillon. Besides, I do think that in the great extension of reading and half-education among young men and many young women, there is a special necessity for knowing the books of the time. I often think what will happen when the movement for the education of women has gone really far. My experience is that literary women are far more disinclined to faith than literary men, and at present the women are the main supporters of the Church.

With this may be compared the following letter, written a few months later to Dr. Marcus Dods :

Of course I agree with you that our criticism is low down, like our literature. They have not been lower since the beginning of the century. Criticism is largely impaired by social intercourse ; it isn't that the critics don't know well enough, but they don't like to say, and so sub-editors redress the balance in little spiteful pars. On the Monday before leaving London we were at a dinner party. Six men were there, all journalists ; of these *five* had received early sheets of his new book from X., with letters ; *three* of these letters contained invitations to his country mansion. This is an extreme case, yet not so very extreme.

*From Dr. James Denney.*

[Professor Henry Drummond had died early in March 1897.]

Broughty Ferry, *March* 15, 1897.

Of course I was sensible of the peculiar spell Henry Drummond always had, a spell that fascinated some, and in others excited an unaccountable feeling, not in the least of repulsion, but of resentment. . . . One felt as if an advantage were being taken of his mind by a power not of the nature of reason, and was irritated by it. At least I felt so, and I daresay when I criticized 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World' a good while afterwards I allowed this kind of irritation too free expression. I am sorry now when I think of it, for Drummond was the most gentle and generous of men, and it must have been to him inexplicably and gratuitously rude. Probably what riled me, as it has done others, in his books was not anything that he said so much as what he did not say—the airy way in which he seemed to do without all that to common Christianity was indispensable. He approached the subject so disinterestedly, with such an entire disregard of its one presupposition—sin—that it was impossible to get upon common ground with him; you had either to be indignant or to pass him by. But this was truer, I feel sure, of his early than of his later work. I cannot understand why 'The Ascent of Man' has not had a sale like 'Natural Law'; it is really a serious contribution to the greatest problem of the time—the discovery of the morality latent in the earlier stages of the world's existence; whereas 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World' is not much better than an audacious series of paradoxes.

The *Contemporary Review* for April contained a memorial sketch of Henry Drummond from Nicoll's pen, which was reprinted at the beginning of Drummond's posthumous volume entitled 'The Ideal Life.'

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *March* 16, 1897.

I have always thought about George Adam Smith that, more than most men, he needs time to do his

best. As you very truly say, Drummond could do well at once; he would have made a first-rate journalist: but that never led him to omit pains. His MSS. were more corrected than any that have ever passed through my hands.

In the spring of 1897 Nicoll selected and published 'Sunday Afternoon Verses,' from those which had appeared in the *British Weekly*. His own share in the volume is explained by the following extract from a letter to Dr. Marcus Dods: 'It is rather difficult to tell the plain truth about the hymns. I write them, when I can find nothing, on Sunday nights. But much oftener I choose or adapt them—write in a verse or two and dress them up from out-of-the-way things. This is rather a discreditable thing to do, or it would be if I claimed any credit for it, which I am far from doing. It makes the question of publication difficult, but I think I shall just say, "Collected by W. R. N." and give no names. Names, indeed, I couldn't give without provoking possible remonstrances. In fact I would much rather not publish them at all.'

## CHAPTER XVII

### BRIGHTER DAYS

In the spring of 1897—the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee—Nicoll wrote from Hampstead to Miss Catherine Pollard :

> I am *sure* no one ought to wish for sorrow. And I am sure it is possible to love God without it, just as it is possible to love man. But when He sends it, and when it is borne in true reverence and faithful submission, I think we find it is not *all* loss but often great gain. That is true of human love as well as of the Divine. But then we do not seek to be led into the depths—we should not seek—unless it is God's will to take us there. I would earnestly pray to be saved more sorrow—at least for years and years. I have had so many terrible bereavements in a few years—father, son, sister, mother-in-law, wife—and my whole heart shivers at the thought of more. We will pray and hope for brighter times.

The prayer and hope were abundantly fulfilled. The brighter days began on May 1, 1897, when at Shillington parish church, near Hitchin, ' the wedding took place of Dr. Robertson Nicoll and Miss Catherine Pollard, daughter of Mr. Joseph Pollard, of Highdown, Herts.' The ceremony was performed by Bishop Mitchinson (afterwards Master of Pembroke College, Oxford) ; and Sir George Douglas, one of the bridegroom's old Kelso friends, acted as best man.

*To Mr. Clement Shorter.*

CAUTERETS, *May* 20, 1897.

We have worked our way here—rather lazily—and I really think that it is the most beautiful

place I have ever seen. You remember of course Tennyson's lines on it. We can thoroughly recommend the Pyrenees to Mrs. Shorter and you for a holiday. The only drawback might be the heat, for the little towns are not as high as in Switzerland. This place is just beginning to wake up. We are in an enormous hotel, and there are about a dozen people, all English apparently.

We spent a week at Arcachon, which is very pretty but with rather a relaxing air. We go to Lourdes to-morrow, and work our way to Toulouse and thence home. I have got newspapers more or less, but shall be very glad to hear the news again. It has been a delightful trip. My wife and I join in kindest regards to Mrs. Shorter and you.

Yours ever affectionately,

W. R. Nicoll.

His second marriage opened a fresh era in Nicoll's domestic happiness. For his children, as well as for their father, Bay Tree Lodge became a true home once more under its gentle and gifted mistress, and in 1898 the family affection was deepened and enriched by the birth of a new daughter.

At the age of forty-five Nicoll had made for himself an influential position in journalism, in theology, and in literature. Doors opened to him on every hand, social engagements multiplied, and his health had now so far improved that he felt able occasionally to accept invitations to the pulpit and the platform.

Thus in July 1897 he delivered an address at Bala Theological College on 'The Secret of Christian Experience.' During 1898 he spoke in January at the opening of the Manchester Primitive Methodist College Settlement in Whitechapel, on the question 'Should the Gospel be preached to every creature?' In April he took part in commemorating the centenary of the Rev. Benjamin Parsons, at Ebley Chapel, Stroud, and also gave an address on 'The Ascent of the Soul' to a conference at Spurgeon's Pastors' College, London. In July he addressed a gathering

of Congregational ministers at Lyndhurst Road Church, Hampstead, on 'What is our Chief Peril?' In October he preached at Viewforth Free Church, Edinburgh, whose minister was his old friend, the Rev. John Morgan. In the Birmingham Town Hall in November Nicoll gave an address at the 150th anniversary of Carr's Lane Meeting, when he drew a parallel between its two famous ministers, John Angell James and R. W. Dale.

In January 1899 he was again at Edinburgh, addressing the annual meeting of Dr. Whyte's Bible Classes. In April he spoke at the closing session of the Baptist Union in London, describing his address as 'A few plain words for ministers, particularly ministers in obscure spheres.' In June, at a conference of Anglican clergy in the Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster, he read a paper entitled 'Suggestions towards an Ethical Union.' In July he preached the Wesleyan Missionary Society's anniversary sermon in Birmingham. In September he opened the session at the Baptist College, Bristol, with an address on 'The Preaching of Hall and Foster.'

On the whole, it may be said that the years from 1897 onward to 1914 formed the most energetic and fruitful period of Nicoll's career.

In May 1898, Mr. G. W. Cable, the American novelist,[1] paid a visit to London, during which his former guests, Barrie and Nicoll, arranged for him to give public readings from his book 'Old Creole Days.' These charming interpretations of the author's delicate and picturesque writing were heightened by Mr. Cable's rendering of characteristic Creole songs—songs which he had learnt from people who still talked and sang the gay French patois of the eighteenth century, when New Orleans belonged to France. Sir Walter Besant presided over one reading, given at Bay Tree Lodge; and Sir Henry Irving over another, at Sir George Lewis's house in Portland Place.

[1] Lafcadio Hearn wrote: 'There is something very singular to me in Cable's power. . . . His stories have a puissant charm which it is hard to analyse.'

*To Professor A. S. Peake.*

27 Paternoster Row, *Oct.* 22, 1897.

You will be glad to hear that the book [1] is being very well received. Denney says Bruce's part is the most living commentary on the Synoptic Gospels in the language.

There are few things that scholars less understand than the line upon line truth which marked the teaching of Christ, and the constant affirmation of the positive side by side with the negative. The new truths should dawn on the Church as gently as the sunlight, and I am not at all sure but that heretics ought to be burnt. I mean the fellows who make a big row and split their Churches. You will say that this is the conservatism of old age possibly.

I send you a copy of my new book, which seems to strike people as ultra-orthodox, though it did not strike me in that way.

The new book was 'The Return to the Cross,' which appeared in October 1897. Concerning this volume Dr. Marcus Dods wrote to Nicoll on November 2: 'It is full of riches, and will bring quickening to many. You should be a happy man, producing so much that really enters into people's lives.'

Dr. Handley C. G. Moule, afterwards Bishop of Durham, wrote from Ridley Lodge, Cambridge, on January 19, 1898: 'Very specially, I have again and again given thanks for your strong and reasoned witness to exactly that range of truth—the truth of guilt and of Cross-won remission and acceptance—the *nulla propter Christum condemnatio*—which is now so widely ignored if not rejected—and the absence of which seems always to me to bring a long and dreary falsetto into the whole music of theology.'

In May 1898, Mr. Gladstone's great career ended. Early in June Nicoll crossed over to Holland for a short stay with his friend Maarten Maartens.

[1] The *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. i., by Dr. A. B. Bruce and Dr. Marcus Dods.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

CHATEAU DE ZUYLESTEIN, PAR LEERSUM, HOLLAND, *June* 15, 1898.

I am out of everything here—except the little telegrams in the Rotterdam paper which Maartens reports to me. It is curious how curiosity itself seems to die when you have crossed the sea. And when you painfully feel that you have to cross it again soon, nothing quite reconciles you. No, not even the prospect of a new novel by Mrs. Humphry Ward, author of 'Robert Elsmere,' etc., or a new Life of Mr. Gladstone.

In 'Notes and Queries':—

*Sea Sickness.* Is there any reference in literature to sea sickness before the appearance of 'Childe Harold,' with the well-known line 'Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll'? *After* the publication of this immortal work the allusions are very numerous. If I am right, two questions will have to be reconsidered: (1) the relations between science and poetry, (2) the range of Lord Byron's influence.—AEGROTAT.

I was never in a house like this before—an old Dutch chateau, very magnificent—rooms with [adjective undecipherable] ceilings and full of accumulated treasures. Schwartz (Maarten Maartens) is of the Dutch nobility, and I have met several of those who live near him, including the Foreign Secretary [of the Netherlands]. They are pleasant and communicative and speak English well. I get back in the beginning of the week.

*To a member of his family.*

HÔTEL ST. JAMES, PARIS [? *Autumn* 1898].

I wish to give you a hint about reading. All the great writers should be approached with a certain reverence. That is, you should say 'There is something great about them whether I see it or not; I must try to see what it is.' If you do not see it, try again. You may ultimately fail. Few people are

so large-minded as to admire *all* that is admirable, and sham admiration is dishonest. But in that case, blame yourself for the failure, and turn all the more earnestly to study what you do admire—what you do see the beauty of. When you read criticisms ask yourself, 'Do I agree with this?' and if not, find out your reasons. I want you so much to think for yourself—to be not presumptuous but independent in your judgment. And I should like you to fall in love with some great writer. That is the true liberal education.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Dec.* 23 [1898].

For myself—I had rather a broken summer with colds and neuralgia, but good health in the winter. I am continually engaged in labour—in fact I think I have worked harder than ever this year. But alas, my dear friend, I grow old—so do you—and I am beginning to prepare for the end. I could not stand this burden many years, but if I could go on say seven or ten years more I should have no need to trouble myself. But who can say what a day may bring forth? I feel I have reason for thankfulness. I have tried a little public speaking here and there, and got on fairly, but I still feel that I could not do it regularly.

I was pleased to get your letters, and mark your contentment and happiness in your children and your comfort in your work. We must meet. Now, look here. Will you come up for a Sunday in March, bring Ella with you and leave her? I will get preaching for you, and we will have a grand time. It must be now years since you were under this roof. Do arrange for it and let me hear. Any Sunday will do, if I know. . . .

But what I selfishly want most is to compare notes on a thousand subjects. I don't feel old, and yet I am 47—not far from 50—and close to my semi-jubilee as an ordained minister.

*To Dr. Marcus Dods.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Christmas Eve*, 1898.

This has been a year of enthusiastic competition and restlessness in our trade, but we have had the best year we ever had—every book has sold and the papers have done well, especially the *B.W.* and the *Bookman*. So I have arranged with Hodder & Stoughton for seven years more, and we are setting our house in order. I see more and more clearly that I am nearing the age-limit for journalists, which is not much past fifty. I do not mean as to contributions—that one might do to the end. But my share in the burden of directing a great business of books and periodicals cannot be carried on through many more years, and when the time comes I shall be very glad to be honourably rid of it. Editors do not last as professors do. I think I should always like to write and work—but to do as I am doing means a great deal, and it is always meaning more.

One job I should have done to-day, and didn't—a review of G. A. Smith's ' Life of Henry Drummond ' for the *Daily Chronicle*. . . . The book confirms what I never could help feeling—that Drummond was a charlatan, in the sense that he was always trying tasks far beyond him. . . . And how remarkably absent are any traces of serious reading and thought—even of reading of any kind. He was as ill-read as a bishop. . . .

For one thing the book made me think better of Drummond. He had the real spirit of a gospeller. I kept thinking of Trench's lines ' I say to thee, do thou repeat,' etc. He did that from first to last, and it was a great thing to do. But I can't say I like his letters to Sankey and his uncle about his orthodoxy. He was not ' orthodox ' ; he didn't think with Sankey ; and he knew it, and shouldn't have pretended to.

As you say, it is very hard to judge a movement, but I do not think infidelity increases. I should

say, however, that superstition had enormously increased. I could tell you some very strange stories about eminent people and palmistry. There may, however, be more unbelief than appears. The Bradlaugh-Huxley style of thing has disappeared, but I am not sure but it has left a sad and silent scepticism. One thing I am pretty sure of—there is much more life in the Churches.

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD [*n.d.*].

I do not like Clifford's writing and his speeches, but I reverence his character as a man. No one is more in the deeps of London—not for a prurient curiosity, but like the Son of Man to seek and save the lost. No one lives in such ascetic simplicity and does more of the hard underground work of reclamation. When people lose son or daughter in London they write to Clifford and he never neglects them. He is by far the most influential Nonconformist in London, and the only one who has great influence with the artisan class.

Early in 1899 Nicoll spent a holiday with his wife in Italy, where they stayed at Rome and at Florence.

Each summer it was his custom to migrate with his family to Lumsden for some weeks in the Old Manse, which he had improved and enlarged. Of his native village and its surroundings he never grew weary. Writing from Aberdeenshire in September 1899, he said, 'The country remains practically unaltered, with its solemn hills, its bright streams, its deep woods, its spacious solitudes. We have had glorious weather, which the breezes kept from being oppressive.'

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ENDING THE CENTURY

The month of October 1899 saw the beginning of the Boer War. Like most Liberals, Nicoll considered Chamberlain's earlier policy in South Africa to have been eminently unwise and unpacific. But the whole situation altered when, in reply to a conciliatory and reasonable British offer in September, President Kruger issued his amazing ultimatum and deliberately chose to fight. Through this chequered struggle the *British Weekly*, like the majority of Liberals and Free Churchmen, supported the Government, though with some strong reservations, until the conflict reached its welcome close in June 1902.

Under the ordeal of war a nation can reveal many noble qualities, but at the same time its baser elements also lift up their heads and grow blatant. Christian leaders became perturbed and anxious as they watched the unworthy temper in which large sections of our people faced this grave public emergency. The following letter to Nicoll from Ian Maclaren was written three months after the war began.

*From the Rev. John Watson.*

17 Croxteth Road, Liverpool, *Jan.* 10, 1900.

I am deeply concerned every day about the love of pleasure and want of seriousness among the young people of our richer classes. They are reading nothing except the worst fiction. They are spending their whole spare time in pleasure, which is growing more doubtful every day. Sunday evening is given to dinners and suppers, and the moral tone is getting very low. Things come under my notice

as a minister which would give any man cause for serious thought. It appears to me that if society is to be saved, and if the Church in especial is to do her proper work, there must be a return to the great Puritan idea of separation from the world. So far as I know, except with a few extreme people—very few now—there is no difference between the Church and the world ; they all dance, they all go to music halls, choosing perhaps the ' Empire ' in preference to the worst ones, they are all eating and drinking on Sunday, and the younger people are growing up without the fear of God. We shall have to cease preaching on many subjects which are interesting and profitable, and devote ourselves to the elementary facts and appeals of religion.

The Puritans made huge mistakes, for which we paid at the Restoration, but too much has been made of those mistakes. The idea that all Puritans were Philistines and fanatics is a vulgar error. John Milton seems to me quite as great a man of letters as any of our tootling little poets and dirty story-tellers who are soaked in debt and drink, and Colonel Hutchinson was as fine a gentleman as the peers who sponged on Hooley.

*To A. T. Quiller-Couch.*

27 Paternoster Row, *Feb.* 15, 1900.

I think it is since I wrote you that I was over in Holland seeing our friend Maartens. He is building a large new house near Utrecht in about a hundred acres of ground. I am sorry to say that he is far from happy, though his wife has returned to him considerably better in health. I do not quite know how to understand his melancholy, but I attribute it largely to the fact that he has nobody to talk to on the things in which he is interested. I am sure that a certain amount of human intercourse is essential for health of mind and body, and the consequence of his isolation is that he takes morbid and jaundiced views of everything. He thinks, for ex-

ample, that his friends in London would hardly speak to him because he is a pro-Boer, and that this prevents his books being sold. He does not understand how small the unit is, and how little people trouble. He is now firmly convinced that, though there is a God and He means well, He is not able to carry out His purposes owing to the strength of the Evil One and is constantly defeated. Maartens has arrived at this conclusion by a study of the South African War, and it has distressed him very much. He reads extremely little, and writes without much heart, and thinks a great deal about his health. . . . If he had two or three congenial friends to meet every other evening and to shake him up and talk, he would be kept right. After all I do think London the best place for literary men to live in, at least till they are able to retire. They can take the measure of things so much better there.

For the Cowper centenary, which was celebrated at Olney in April 1900, Nicoll prepared an address on 'The Passion of Cowper.' This, however, he was unable to deliver, but it appeared in the *British Weekly* of May 3, and was reprinted in 'The Lamp of Sacrifice.' In June, Nicoll preached at the Conference of the Methodist New Connexion, Newcastle-on-Tyne, on 'Not Afraid of Sackcloth.' In July he read a paper on 'A Country Minister's Library' at a Conference of Congregational ministers in Lyndhurst Road Church, Hampstead.

*To Dr. D. Hay Fleming.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, *June* 20 [1900].

Many thanks for your review of Andrew Lang ['History of Scotland,' Vol. I.]. It occurred to me very strongly when I was at Eastbourne that work of this kind is most important. Lang's misrepresentations of the Reformers cannot be effectively met by mere argument. What has to be done is to show that he does not really know his subject. This

is the kind of criticism that shows him up and that affects others. Were he a mere secular historian leaving these things alone, it might be doubted whether it was worth while to give valuable time to exposing him. He is far more than that. As far as in him lies he exposes to ridicule and contempt what is most sacred and venerable in Scottish history. Your writings have done a great deal to lower his reputation and weaken his influence as a historian, and nobody knows this better than himself.

The review referred to above appeared in the *British Weekly* of May 31, 1900. When Vol. II. of Lang's 'History of Scotland' was published it was severely criticized by the same reviewer in two articles entitled 'John Knox in the hands of the Philistines,' which appeared in the *British Weekly* of February 19 and 26, 1903. These are included with a number of other articles by the same scholar, exposing Andrew Lang's unfairness to the Scottish Reformers and Covenanters, in Dr. Hay Fleming's volume 'Critical Reviews relating chiefly to Scotland,' 1912.

*To his Wife.*

[Mafeking had been relieved on May 17.]

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *July* 1900.

Mr. Stoughton is much perplexed how the story got up about his being on the roof of a hansom on Mafeking night and blowing a trumpet. It seems that Mr. Hodder was seen flying the flag on a 'bus and is proud of it !

On October 31, 1900, the union between the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland was solemnly consummated in Edinburgh. Nicoll was present at this historic event, and wrote a vivid description of the proceedings for the *British Weekly*.

Earlier in the same month a General Election took place—often referred to as the 'Khaki Election'—

which resulted in returning to the House of Commons 362 Conservatives, 69 Liberal Unionists, 187 Liberals, and 82 Nationalists, and thus confirmed Lord Salisbury in power.

On November 21, 1900, Nicoll issued the first number of his *British Monthly*, a new sixpenny 'record of religious life and work,' finely printed and profusely illustrated. A supplement described and depicted the union between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church which had just been publicly ratified at Edinburgh. The magazine also contained the 'story of Dr. Alexander Maclaren's Church in Manchester'; a discriminating review of Hall Caine's new novel 'The Master Christian'; short stories by Mary E. Wilkins and David Lyall; together with a symposium on the question 'Should missionaries leave their posts in time of danger?'

In the spring of 1900 Ian Maclaren had been unanimously appointed Moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England. This honour he valued very highly, though the following humorous letter to Nicoll shows how he felt the strain of the duties which his office entailed.

*From the Rev. John Watson.*

17 Croxteth Road, Liverpool, Nov. 30, 1900.

Let me entreat and implore you as a friend and a fellow-creature never, in any circumstances, to become a Moderator. It will reduce your intellect to the fertility of a paving-stone, will tear your temper to pieces and change your character to that of a savage. You say you never take advice, and I know that you are hankering to be a Moderator, but before you decide consider your poor friend and his blasted life. You are thinking of the honour; let me tell you it is a heavy crown to carry, and although you will not believe me, as you look up to me from your low and humble place, I long for the day I can lift off the crown and place it on the head of the Rev. James Christie, B.A., of Carlisle. You

are at liberty to use this passage when I am gone in an article on the sorrows of high rank.

Yours condescendingly,

ATHANASIUS MACWHAMMEL,
*Moderator.*

In the opening week of the new century Nicoll wrote to Dr. Marcus Dods :

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, *Jan.* 2, 1901.

I have been unusually busy, as my two best assistants have had to get a rest. So in six days I have dictated for print 35,000 words, besides letters innumerable.

Do you know that I have entered on my fiftieth year ? I never thought to live so long—and so my schemes and plans of life fall to dust, or rather have to be enlarged. However, I am glad to say that I now look forward very little—and am satisfied for the most part if I can get through the day's work in the day. I wish one could quite live ' in the holy carelessness of the eternal now,' as George MacDonald has it.

*From Dr. Marcus Dods.*

23 GREAT KING STREET, EDINBURGH,
*Jan.* 3, 1901.

I am much touched by your most sympathetic letter, especially as you are so overburdened with work. Long may you be able to do 35,000 words in a week. Your nervous energy must be intact and equal to that of three strong men. At present it overwhelms me even to think of such a task. I am quite out of sorts—anxiety and want of sleep have made it very difficult for me to work. My wife, I fear, gets worse rather than better and I cannot but be much with her. She is absolutely prostrate, worn out with pain and disease. A specialist has seen her this morning, and gives me very little hope. It makes me quite sick, and you will understand why I write no more but merely thank you for your letter.

*From Dr. Marcus Dods.*

23 Great King Street, Edinburgh,
*Jan.* 17, 1901.

After six days' unconsciousness my wife passed into her rest early this morning. You know what it means.

*From Maarten Maartens.*

*Jan.* 23, 1901.

Yet, look at my wife—always racked by rheumatism in the head, always bright. Women can do that sort of thing—rare women. Had Job been a woman there would have been no Book of Job, for she would simply have sat down in the muck-heap and said : 'How good God is !'

*To A. T. Quiller-Couch.*

27 Paternoster Row, *Feb.* 24, 1901.

I was at the Whitefriars' Club on Friday night when Anthony Hope was the guest. He spoke about criticism from the point of view of the criticized, and I spoke afterwards from the other point of view. He said that every novelist had a certain regard and gratitude for Miss Corelli because she had routed the critics on their own ground and sold her books without sending copies to reviewers. But surely the positions of the publisher's reader and of the critic are different. The publisher's reader's business is mainly to say whether a book will sell. The critic is not called upon to express a judgment on that. He has to decide whether the book is good literature or not. Taken in this way, the victory of the critics has been complete, and Marie Corelli ceasing to send out her books is a striking testimony to that victory, for it means that she knows that wherever the books go and amid all the vicissitudes of the journalistic world she will never get a competent person to say that her works are literature.

*To the Rev. Dr. Waddell, Dunedin, N.Z.*

27 Paternoster Row, London, *March* 18, 1901.

I value very much your kind expression about the *British Weekly*, which continues to take up the main part of my time. I often wish that I felt free to hand it over to somebody else, for the labour is irksome and continuous, but so long as the circulation continues to go up I do not feel free to do so. The circulation has exactly doubled in five years. I suppose one ought to feel gratified at this, but the labour and responsibility are very great. What I like least is being obliged to express opinions on political subjects. It is a work to which I do not feel in any way called, though I like well enough to write about religion and literature. However, there it is, and we must make the best of it.

In April 1901 Nicoll preached the annual sermon [1] of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, in Great Queen Street Chapel, London. He took for a text the words : ' Without shedding of blood there is no — ' and probably no discourse he ever delivered produced a more profound impression. The preacher laid emphasis on the sacrificial price which has to be paid for every supreme achievement. His final sentence, uttered with passionate intensity, was : ' Without shedding of blood there is no—there is *nothing*.'

In the same month Nicoll began in the *British Weekly* the series of articles which were afterwards published in his volume ' The Church's One Foundation.'

Lord Shaw of Dunfermline took a leading part in securing Mr. Andrew Carnegie's munificent gift of £2,000,000 to the Universities of Scotland, half of which was devoted to abolishing all fees which had been required from their students. In this effort he testifies that he had no abler or more persuasive coadjutor than Nicoll. At one point there was a real

[1] Published under the title ' Gethsemane, the Rose Garden of God,' in 'The Lamp of Sacrifice,' 1906.

danger lest Mr. Carnegie's gift should be limited to students whose parents pleaded poverty to obtain it. Lord Shaw writes : [1]

'Well did I know that all over Scotland fathers and mothers, who and whose families were an honour to the land, the very men, women, and children whom it was a pride to preserve and favour—they would never, never plead this ground of poverty : they would rather die first. The issue was—a dole or a right. . . .

'One journalist who knew his Scotland widely, deeply, and at the first hand of a lifetime, foresaw the peril and went to Carnegie. It was Sir William Robertson Nicoll. After his interview he wrote the following letter to Mr. Carnegie :

"Bay Tree Lodge, Frognal, *June* 5, 1901.

"Dear Mr. Carnegie,

"I am constrained to write a line to thank you for what I saw and heard to-day. When I observed you with ——, my heart sank. He is a good man, but he is an aristocrat from the beginning, and he knows nothing of the poor. I am nobody—nothing but a journalist—but I have known what it is to be very poor—and very proud—and my whole heart is with the poor to this day. If you will observe the tender consideration and regard for the poor which I saw in you to-day in the terms of your settled gift, you will have the blessing of Scotsmen to the end of time. I rejoiced also that the provision for scientific education will be kept in your own strong and even hands and not given over to the University Courts of Scotland—the most quarrelsome and impractical and the least democratic bodies in the world. . . . My whole heart goes out to you. May God bless you.

"Yours sincerely,

"W. Robertson Nicoll."'

In the *British Weekly* for May 30, 'Claudius Clear' had published 'An Open Letter to Andrew Carnegie,

[1] 'Letters to Isobel,' pp. 164-5.

Esq.' on the same subject. The amount of the gift had been publicly announced on May 21.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

GRAND PUMP ROOM HOTEL, BATH [*n.d.*].

What characters these novelist women are. Never marry one of them ! No man is really safe except with a girl who plays the organ or sings in the choir !

LUMSDEN, ABERDEEN [*August* 1901].

I am being very much bothered here by applications to preach, open bazaars, etc., and two Aberdeen authors have offered to visit me with MSS. I am trying to spread a rumour that I have smallpox.

*To his Wife.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 1901.

Saturday at 10.15 I was [in bed] reading about the President,[1] when Annie came in and said a Mr. Moore had called and said he had an introduction. I sent for the introduction, and it was from Dr. Stalker. So I got up and went in, and found a man from Glasgow, about 30. He said he was a chartered accountant, but thought he would like to change his profession and take a place in a publisher's office. I said, Did you not read my 'Claudius Clear' about that ?

*The Man.* Yes : but I thought I would like to talk to you.

*W. R. N.* What would you say if a publisher were to come to you and say he wished a place as an accountant ?

*The Man.* I would say, 'You must be trained.'

*W. R. N.* That is exactly what I say to you. It takes as much training to be a publisher as an accountant.

I was civil, but very angry.

[1] President M'Kinley, who had just been murdered by an anarchist.

'Letters on Life,' the first volume of selections from 'The Correspondence of Claudius Clear,' was published in the autumn of that year. Its appearance seems to have been the occasion of the following letter from Nicoll's old friend, the proprietor of the *Dundee Advertiser*:

*From Sir John Leng, M.P.*

KINBRAE, NEWPORT, FIFE, N.B., *Oct.* 3, 1901.

I am always amazed at your own intellectual 'output.' It is marvellous to me how much you both write and supervise. Is it really wise for you to think of undertaking more? I know by experience how many things one can conceive and plan and, as long as in health, can accomplish. But the time comes when there is great risk of overtaxing one's strength. Some accident or serious illness reduces one's vitality and stamina, and then the grasshopper becomes a burden. Considering how much you have achieved already, should you not begin, as Bacon I think says, to 'put a stay' upon yourself?

At the dedication of the new Wesleyan Methodist Hall in Edinburgh on October 17, 1901, Nicoll was the preacher. The subject of his sermon was 'The Watershed.'[1] A few days later he received a letter of gratitude from the Rev. George Jackson, then superintendent of the Edinburgh Wesleyan Methodist Mission, and the following was Nicoll's reply.

*To the Rev. George Jackson.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, *Oct.* 25 [1901].

Many thanks for the cheque you kindly sent, but I do not take any money for preaching and I pay my own expenses.[2] So, if you will kindly take the cheque as my subscription to your hall, or if it is more convenient simply strike it out, I shall be

[1] Afterwards included in his volume 'The Lamp of Sacrifice,' 1906.
[2] This was Nicoll's fixed rule.

much obliged. I was greatly impressed in Edinburgh both by the work you had accomplished and the opportunity before you for more work. It is a great thing for a man to feel that he has justified his existence, and you have much more than justified yours.

To a friend who had dangerous illness in his family, Nicoll wrote in 1901 : 'I deeply sympathize with you in your experiences. I know these deep waters. What I went through when my wife and son seemed both to be dying, and I had to move between the one and the other, I could never tell. I have never been the same man since—never so light-hearted. One gets to know what life and death mean. But so long as the life is given one can take courage.'

In December Nicoll travelled up to Aberdeenshire to preach in Inverbrothock U.F. Church, on the occasion of the semi-jubilee of its minister, his old friend the Rev. Alexander Rust.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

HÔTEL DES ANGLAIS, MENTON, [*January*] 1902.

I trust you and I will have the sense to retire quietly and in good time and not hold on desperately and be driven out amidst clouds and estrangements.

After nearly thirty years of hard work one has the right to say that the most has been done. We will still go on, while there is a need and we have strength. But we have borne our burdens, and the new generation must bear theirs. I feel very thankful to have got through so far, and I do not envy the young in the very least—but wish them well.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *NEL MEZZO DEL CAMMIN*

It will be seen that for Nicoll the months and years which followed became more and more crowded with labour in varied fields—literary, theological, ecclesiastical, and political.

In the autumn of 1901 dissensions in the Liberal party grew more and more acute. Shortly before Christmas Lord Rosebery delivered a notable speech at Chesterfield, and as an outcome of this the Liberal League was formed in February 1902, to maintain and popularize the principles of Liberal Imperialism. Nicoll became a member of the League, of which Lord Rosebery was President, with Mr. Asquith, Sir H. H. Fowler, and Sir Edward Grey as Vice-Presidents. Throughout this controversy, however, the *British Weekly* pleaded for Liberal reconciliation and reunion.

In November 1901 Nicoll published 'The Church's One Foundation.' This volume contained in revised form the series of leading articles on 'Christ and Recent Criticism' which had been appearing from April to June in the *British Weekly* from its editor's pen.

*From the Rev. Dr. Alexander Maclaren.*

Carill Drive, Fallowfield, Manchester,
*Jan.* 31, 1902.

I have been busy, but I have read every word of the books you were good enough to send me, and wonder at your fertility, your sure touch, your delicate insight and a score of other graces. How you manage to turn out such work at such a rate and with all the rest of your burdens, passes my slow-travelling wit to conceive. 'The Church's

> One Foundation' is a noble bit of work and has done me good, and will, I hope, do good to many others, who perhaps need it more. You must not talk about not being able to stand the strain long. If you were within a fortnight of being 76, as I am, you might begin to think of retiring. But what would become of the Free Churches if you and Parker and I all subsided into silence in 1902?

In March 1902 the Free Church Council met at Bradford, and Nicoll accepted its invitation to preach the official sermon. His subject was 'The Message for Midnight,'[1] and the impressions recorded by some of his hearers may help to give an idea of the preacher. They saw in the pulpit 'a thin, slight form, with uplifted arms and drooping hands, speaking deliberately, but in a subdued key of deep feeling.' They heard a discourse penetrated with mystical passion and delivered in 'the plaintive cadences of a clear though slender voice which held his great congregation in awed silence.'

In April 1902 Nicoll crossed over to Belfast, where he preached the annual sermon[1] of the Central Presbyterian Association from the text 'I will build My Church.' The next day he lectured on 'Friends and Acquaintances: a Talk about Books.' Later in the same month he addressed a meeting at St. Albans, at which Mr. Clement Shorter had read a paper on Cowper.

In the spring of the same year Mr. Balfour introduced in the House of Commons his Education Bill, which provoked a fierce and prolonged conflict. Some account of the arduous part which Nicoll played therein appears in another section of this volume. In July Lord Salisbury retired from public life, and Mr. Balfour took his place as Prime Minister.

Among the notable residents in Hampstead was Dr. Joseph Parker, who had a warm regard for Nicoll and used to call the leading article in the *B.W.* 'my weekly loaf.'

[1] Published afterwards in 'The Lamp of Sacrifice.'

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD [*Autumn*, 1902].

Poor old Joseph Parker fancies he has got cancer. I don't know—I hope not—but he is very much down, and I have to cheer him up as best I can. He is such a lonely old man, never having made friends. And a young bride, whose marriage we attended two years ago, seems to have real cancer. 'Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear' is a text which has been often in my mind.

For Dr. Parker, in spite of his idiosyncrasies, Nicoll felt unbounded admiration as a unique pulpit genius. The two men became drawn into common friendship, which grew more intimate when the great preacher had to mourn over his wife's death. After Parker's own health began to fail, Nicoll for many months paid him weekly visits, which were eagerly welcomed. It was by Parker's personal desire that Nicoll delivered the memorial address at his funeral in the City Temple on December 4, 1902. Some who were present will never forget how impressively the speaker ended by quoting a benediction often on the dead man's lips, and then exclaiming: 'That voice—shall we not hear it again?'

A fortnight earlier the sudden death of Hugh Price Hughes had come to Nicoll as 'a keen and disabling personal distress.'

In October 1902 Ernest Hodder-Williams, the eldest grandson of Mr. M. H. Hodder, became a partner in the firm of Hodder & Stoughton. From his youth he had been working in their publishing house, and this brought him into close and confidential intercourse with Nicoll. The relations between the elder man and the younger ripened into deep and affectionate regard, and there grew up between them a sympathy which became almost paternal on the one side and almost filial on the other.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

[Who had been obliged to leave London for a rest.]

27 Paternoster Row, *Dec.* 19, 1902.

I was very much vexed to receive your long letter, which shows that you are exciting yourself very much on matters of business. The only chance of recovery is to put all those things out of your mind till you come back. Read good novels, and talk to people, and keep your mind easy, or you will never get well. You need not have any fear about the business ; we will attend to it well enough. I will take the whole charge of the *Bookman*, along with Miss Hamel, and produce it satisfactorily. You ought to have no communications whatever from the Row while you are away.

When you come back it will be absolutely necessary for you to consider what you can do and what you cannot do. I trust that you are not going to be handicapped by ill health, as I have been. However, in all these sixteen years I have done my work regularly, ill or well, and regularity is the indispensable requisite in business. It is absolutely necessary for you to consider this, and put it right. Also you must not take the ordinary vicissitudes of business too hard. You must borrow a leaf out of the book of Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, whose admirable composure I have often admired. There will be ups and downs, do what you please. I am afraid that your knowledge from day to day of what is going on does harm. I am most anxious that your health should be re-established, and I am sure that what is putting it wrong is those two things—first, doing too much ; and next, taking things too hard. Forgive this admonition from one whom you know to be a true friend, and tell your wife what I have said and ask her to enforce it, and to keep all knowledge of business away from you till you return to it. I assure you I am looking well

after the new books and will produce a very decent list in due time.

Now I do not wish to hear any more from you about business.

In January 1903 Nicoll and his wife stayed at Nice, where he characteristically found his way into an old circulating library and browsed with delight among half-forgotten English books stored away on the shelves and neglected by generations of visitors. It was during this visit to Nice that 'Claudius Clear' wrote to the *British Weekly*:

'If I am ever appointed examiner for English Literature Honours at a University, I should be content with one question. What really tests knowledge is information about inconsiderable yet conspicuous people. Thus, if I were examining on the literary history of the early years of last century, I should put but one question, "What do you know of Lydia White?" Whoever could answer satisfactorily would have a full knowledge of the literary history of the period.'

Who *was* Lydia White? Allusions to this lady may be discovered in Sir Walter Scott's letters and diaries.[1] He wrote from Edinburgh to Lady Louisa Stuart on June 9, 1808: 'A crazy Welshwoman is come to see our romantic scenery. . . . She is a certain Miss Lydia White, nineteen times dyed blue, lively and clever and absurd to the uttermost degree, but exceedingly good-natured.' She lived at 43 Park Street, London, where Sir Walter visited her, and where she died in 1827. Peter Cunningham tells us that she was 'celebrated for her lively wit and for her blue stocking parties, unrivalled, it is said, in the soft realm of blue Mayfair.'

On Nicoll's return from Nice his days and weeks became busier than ever. In February he addressed the annual meeting of Sefton Park Presbyterian Church, Liverpool (Ian Maclaren's) on 'The Church Outside the Churches.' In March he spoke on the Education Bill at the meeting of the Free Church Council in

[1] 'Journal,' i. 305; ii. 351-2. 'Familiar Letters,' i. 114, 228, 283.

Brighton ; and preached on ' The Lamb's War with the Beast ' at the anniversary of the London Wesleyan Mission in City Road Chapel. In April he preached to the Surrey Congregational Union at Guildford.

During the summer of 1903 Nicoll found a fresh vocation on public platforms, and addressed crowded meetings against the Education Bill and in favour of ' Passive Resistance.' He spoke at Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leicester, Slough, Scarborough, and Leek. It was in the autumn of the same year that Chamberlain entered upon his memorable ' Tariff Reform ' campaign, and the whole country seethed with political controversy.

In October 1903, Nicoll went to Aberdeen and opened the session of the University Debating Society with an address on ' The Lost Art of Reading.' [1] The following letter, written to Mrs. Nicoll on October 16 by Professor Stalker, gives a vivid glimpse of how the students rose to the occasion :

> Your husband's appearance before the Aberdeen students to-night has been a brilliant success. They are a noisy crew and chaffed the chairman's speech unmercifully ; but, the instant Dr. Nicoll commenced, he caught their close and silent attention. For a long time he was argumentative and didactic, and they listened critically, punctuating, however, every point with applause ; but at last he emerged into complete freedom and fun, and they enjoyed themselves hugely. I wish you had heard the shout that burst from them as he sat down ; none but students can do such cheering, like the going-off of a park of artillery, sudden, unanimous, and prolonged. It was delightful to see him looking so well and able to speak so long apparently without effort.

Nicoll had a very high regard for Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton—both on intellectual and on personal grounds. When ' Aylwin ' was published, the *Contemporary Review* for December 1898 contained an

[1] Published as a booklet by T. Y. Crowell & Co., New York.

article by Nicoll on 'The Significance of Aylwin,' which began with the words : 'The recognized master of English critics has at last taken his place among novelists.' Watts-Dunton, however, was firmly convinced that he was first a poet, then a novelist, and last and least a critic. Consequently he disparaged the critical and biographical essays with which for many years he illuminated the pages of the *Athenaeum*.[1] Nicoll ardently desired permission to republish a selection of these essays, but this wish was never realized.

*To Theodore Watts-Dunton.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, *Nov.* 28, 1903.

After all, it seems rather absurd of me to write to you for information about your critical work. It would be much more fitting that you should write to me, for I am certain I know it a great deal better than you do. That you wasted your time in criticism I shall never believe. Creative criticism is as high a form of creation as poetry and fiction, and very much rarer. When I think of the way in which you have treated these precious essays, by first forgetting them yourself, and then by scattering them in such a way that your most diligent readers cannot recover them, and then to crown all by firmly refusing to allow your friends to collect them, I burn with a just and noble indignation. Why don't you let me and Douglas have our chance? It is years and years since I read your 'Encyclopaedia Britannica' article on Rossetti. When I went over it the other night I was very strongly impressed by its wonderful depth and power. The contrast between it and the ordinary or extraordinary criticism of the day is simply astounding. I was again in the company of Coleridge, and with that single exception I do not know any English critic who is to be named with you. You see I can stand up to you !

[1] Watts-Dunton's famous article on 'The Poetic Interpretation of Nature' appeared in the *Athenaeum* of July 14, 1877.

During 1904, political conflict grew still more acute. Early that spring sharp controversy arose over imported Chinese labour in the Transvaal. In April the Government Licensing Bill was brought forward and provoked bitter opposition before it passed into law. The Passive Resistance movement went on.

During 1904, Nicoll addressed the Free Church Council at Newcastle in March ; and in April spoke at the Whitefriars' Club and at Spurgeon's Pastors' College. He preached at the opening of Woodford Union Church for Mr. Joseph Hocking at the end of April ; addressed a Ministers' Holiday Conference at Oxford in September on 'The Pastor in Contact with Great National Problems' ; and preached at Viewforth U.F. Church, Edinburgh, in October. He took part in the recognition of Dr. Campbell Morgan as minister of Westminster Chapel, in November. He also spoke at Passive Resistance meetings in the City Temple in October when the Rev. R. J. Campbell presided, and in Hampstead Town Hall in December.

Being as he was a humanist and a mystic, as well as a sagacious man of the world—in the best sense of that phrase—Nicoll could never shrivel into an ecclesiastically-minded person. But he had profound belief in organized Christianity, and his devotion to his native faith and order kept him intensely concerned in the progress of Presbyterianism. He watched with ardent and affectionate hope the movements towards Church union in Scotland. Those movements had his steady, well-informed support, and he would fain have lived to see their complete triumph. The calamitous decision given by the House of Lords against the United Free Church of Scotland in 1904 fell upon him like a personal blow. Nicoll himself considered that this disaster might have been avoided if Principal Rainy, the protagonist of union between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church, had paid heed to warnings which he received from legal authorities like Mr. Alexander Asher, K.C.,[1] before

[1] Dean of the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh, who died in 1905.

the historic Uniting Act had been adopted by both Churches in October 1900.

The opponents of the Union, who formed a minute minority of the Free Church, carried their protest into the Courts of Law. Though a mere remnant, they claimed to be the legal representatives of the Free Church and therefore to be entitled to the whole of that Church's property. The highest tribunal in Scotland unanimously dismissed their claim. They appealed to the House of Lords, where the case was finally decided in favour of the appellants. The judgment was delivered on Monday, August 1, 1904. The effect of this amazing decision, which threw Scotland into confusion, has been summed up [1] as follows :

'The entire property of the Free Church of Scotland, which (in the year 1900) was a Church with some 1100 ministers, three fully equipped theological colleges, and a missionary organization which ranked second or third among the Protestant missions of the world, was ordered to be given over to a Church with some score and a half ministers, one professor with (it is said) three students, and not a single missionary.'

*To his Wife.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD,
*Thursday, 4th Aug.* 1904.

In the afternoon of Monday [August 1], Mr. Donald, the editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, came round to take me to his office to write the leader. We got there at five. As it was Bank Holiday, everything was disorganized and it was seven o'clock before I got the decision of the judges in detail. I had asked Taylor Innes to dine with me at the Devonshire Club at 7.30, so I telephoned to him to wait, read the judgments, dictated the article (which I sent you) a column long, and got to the Devonshire at five minutes to eight ! The quickest bit of work I have ever done. The article [in the *Daily Chronicle*] seems to have made an impression, as you may have

[1] See 'The Life of Principal Rainy,' by Dr. P. Carnegie Simpson, p. 354.

noticed. I also ' inspired ' the *Westminster* and the *Daily Mail*. At the Devonshire I saw Mr. Asher, our chief counsel—a fine man. Poor Innes was so down in the mouth that he could not eat, but I got him into better spirits. I was not home till 12.30. Then on Tuesday I was all day at my huge leader [for the *British Weekly*]. It is certainly the hardest bit of work I have ever done. I finished it about 10 P.M. It is the best that ever I could do, and I hope I may never have such a job again.

How deeply Nicoll felt his burden of responsibility appears in the following letter to his wife, written a few days earlier, when the decision of the House of Lords, though anxiously awaited, had not been actually pronounced :

EMPIRE HOTEL, BUXTON [*July* 1904].

I do my best, but I feel that I have dangerously strained myself of late. You see, to me these extra things are all extra. I cannot slacken off my ordinary work as some can, but must do that and the rest too.

In the first week of August, Nicoll travelled to Edinburgh, in order to be present at the meeting of the United Free Church, called to consider this crisis in its fortunes. During the following months he wrote leader after leader in the *British Weekly* protesting against the injustice from which his Church was suffering.

Before the year closed a Royal Commission was appointed to deal with the situation created by the judgment of the House of Lords. After it had reported in April 1905, the Government introduced and passed an Act of Parliament which established an executive commission, in order to allocate the property ' fairly and equitably ' between the United Free Church and the ' Wee Frees '—to use the name popularly applied to the protesting minority. The final division gave the latter about £500,000, 117 churches, and the offices in Edinburgh ; while the U.F. Church received

roughly £1,000,000, 900 churches, the Colleges, and the Foreign Mission buildings, etc.

The year 1905 multiplied Nicoll's engagements. Thus in February he preached at the opening of the Wesley Memorial Church at Leatherhead; and in May delivered the anniversary sermon of the West London Mission in Queen's Hall. In June he preached to the Methodist New Connexion Conference at Leeds; and in Viewforth United Free Church, Edinburgh; and also lectured at the Glasgow Summer School of Theology on 'The Practical Uses of Christian Mysticism.' In July he spoke at a meeting addressed by leaders of the United Free Church in Queen's Hall, London. In September he preached at the opening of the new North U.F. Church, Aberdeen, and gave an address at the recognition of the Rev. F. A. Russell as minister of the King's Weigh House Chapel, London. In October he preached at the anniversary of Claremont Hall, Pentonville, and in Emmanuel Congregational Church, Cambridge, where he also addressed a united meeting of the Nonconformist societies of the University. In November he preached in Great Queen Street Wesleyan Chapel, London.

*To the Rev. George Jackson.*

HAMPSTEAD, *April* 1, 1905.

There is nobody who has more sympathy with the work of ministers than I have. I know how hard it is to meet the constant demand for freshness of heart and intellect. However, the journalist has his own job. He is always expected to be fresh, and he practically never gets a real holiday. I cannot say how long it is since I had a week in which I dictated nothing for the press. All this leaves so little over for other things that one would fain do.

*To Mr. T. W. Stoughton.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, *April* 5, 1905.

I came back on Friday to dine with Lord Rosebery. There were only about half a dozen there,

and he spoke very frankly. He seems quite certain of a Liberal majority [as the result of the next election], but thought they would have great difficulties. He thinks that if John Burns is put in the Cabinet, the Labour members will go against the Government. He says they all hate John Burns like poison. He thinks C. B. has been doing well lately—and that his speech on the Ainsworth [1] motion was as good as Gladstone could have done. His great fear for the Liberals is that they will not stick together. He said that if Gladstone's old trousers were on the Front Bench they would drum the Government out ; if his collar was there, they would all rise and flee.

He was much interested about Gladstone and Chamberlain. He stood up for Gladstone—said he was as high-minded a statesman as there ever was. But he admitted that Gladstone never forgave Chamberlain for his unauthorised programme. In this Rosebery thought Gladstone right. It was a gross breach of discipline.

He confessed that he read the papers much—especially in the night when he could not sleep. He seemed to know the *B.W.* from start to finish.

*To Mr. T. W. Stoughton.*

Devonshire Club [*April* 15, 1905].

On Thursday night [April 13] I went to the Liberal League dinner at the Hotel Cecil. It was very successful. Rosebery, who was in good spirits, made an excellent speech. Lord Northampton was very hearty, but he is not a speaker. Asquith, who has gone very white, is a much better speaker than he used to be, and Fowler though looking old was lively. Everybody seemed to think that we were in for a dissolution in June or July.

[1] On March 22, 1905, Mr. Ainsworth, M.P. for Argyllshire, had moved in the House of Commons a resolution condemning the imposition of a ten per cent. duty on imported manufactured goods. Mr. Balfour refused to discuss the question, and Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman poured scorn on him for not daring to debate Protection. The Unionists declined to vote, and the resolution was carried by 254 to 2.

But I am not much at home in political gatherings, and I enjoyed myself much more last Saturday [April 8] at the Greenwood dinner.[1] This was really a great success. John Morley and Barrie illustrated better than anything I have ever seen the difference between talent and genius. Morley's speech was talent carried to the highest point. Barrie's was the careless effort of genius. But Barrie's speech had ten times the effect of Morley's.

During the autumn of this year Nicoll published two more books : ' The Garden of Nuts,' and ' The Day Book of Claudius Clear.' ' A History of English Literature,' by W. R. Nicoll and Thomas Seccombe, Vol. I., also appeared in October, and in that month he took a short holiday in Paris.

*To his Wife.*

HÔTEL ST. JAMES, PARIS, *Oct.* 10, 1905.

To-day is my birthday, 54—a good long term. Well, six years more work I must face, and by that time if I live I shall be thankful to be quiet. It reminds me of my birthday in America nine years ago, when I was 45. Nobody knew of it ; I did not tell Barrie ; and so it is here. It is what I like best, though I would not like others to take their birthdays the same way. But somehow all my life has been a struggle, and it is a struggle still and likely to be so, and that makes the time look much longer.

*To his daughter Mildred* (aged seven).

HÔTEL ST. JAMES, PARIS, *Oct.* 1905.

DEAREST MILDRED,

So you have begun to write reviews Very good indeed ! Always praise your book.

This is a nice big white city with very broad streets. There are a great many toy shops in it. I

[1] To Frederick Greenwood, at one time editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, whom Nicoll described as 'the prince of journalists.'

am going out to look at them. Perhaps I will buy a dolly for myself. I think I would like a dolly. It would be nice company for me—would it not?

Your very loving

POPSY WOPSY.

x x x x x x

The 1000th number of the *British Weekly* appeared on December 28, 1905. In a review of the changes which had come about since the first number was published on November 5, 1886, Nicoll declared that 'Nonconformity as a religious force has conspicuously advanced.' The Christian redemption was being faithfully preached from its pulpits, and it was now doing mighty work among the poor. Of the National Free Church Council he wrote: 'When it was first started, we had our doubts; but they have long since been completely swept away.' On the other hand, 'the Anglican Church, as far as the clergy are concerned, becomes less and less Protestant.' . . . 'The signal feature in literature is the increasing power and predominance of fiction.' Nicoll realized vividly that for countless multitudes in these days the literature of fiction is their daily bread. And he believed also, as Sydney Dobell believed, that there will yet arise some great modern novelist as a chief apostle of God.

The close of the year witnessed a dramatic political transformation. Mr. Balfour and his Cabinet resigned, and Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman became Premier in December. A General Election followed in January 1906, which returned to the House of Commons 377 Liberals, 53 Labour men, and 83 Nationalists, against 132 Conservatives and 25 Liberal Unionists. Nicoll's leader in the *British Weekly* of January 18 was entitled 'The Avalanche.'

*To his daughter Constance.*

EMPIRE HOTEL, BATH, [*early in January* 1906].

I have read two books—Law's 'Serious Call,' and 'Sir Richard Calmady'—very different. I should

like you to read Law some time. He has a powerful, masterful mind.

The following characteristic epistle was written by Ian Maclaren to his hostess, after a visit that he paid to Bay Tree Lodge in the last week of January 1906.

17 Croxteth Road, Liverpool, *Jan.* 30, 1906.

. . . Once or twice while listening to Dr. Nicoll on Saturday morning I tried to get in a word, and was rebuked for interloping. He thought that I was going to disagree with his views, or even offer a remark of my own, and he was justly indignant at such temerity. Would you kindly say to my host that I really wanted to thank him for one of the most admirable dinners at which I have ever assisted, and for the Christian function he assigned me of tempering the Liberal wind to the shorn Anglican lamb. Latterly the two of us [1] crept close together, and we parted with the fellow-feeling of lads who had visited the Head Master at the same time, and for the same end.

As I am writing, it may be worth while giving in more accurate form the last words your husband addressed to me that morning—at 3 A.M.—in my bed-room.

'You ask me the secret of my remarkable success' —(I had not done so, because I had never had the chance).

'It has been due to two causes: first, legible handwriting, and second, regular attendance at Church.'

Turning at the door, with tears in his eyes he added: 'Whatever have been my faults, I thank Heaven that I have never been a half-day hearer.'

When I recovered he was gone, but I hope that I may never forget those noble words which I shall often use at Y.M.C.A. and P.S.A. Bi-centenaries.

Yours respectfully,

Thomas J. Hopps.

[1] *I.e.* Dr. Watson and the 'lamb.'

In February 1906 Nicoll spent two or three weeks at Bordighera. After his return he spoke on March 2 in the Hotel Cecil at a dinner to nearly 200 Free Church members of the new House of Commons. On March 8 he preached at the meeting of the Free Church Council in Birmingham on 'Some Aspects of the Mystical Union.' The next day he gave an address in London to the Johnson Club on Dr. Birkbeck Hill's edition of Johnson's 'Lives of the Poets.' In April he preached at the Central Hall, Manchester, for the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society; and at Leyton for the Rev. George Jeffrey. In May he spoke at a meeting in Stockwell in connexion with the retirement of his friend the Rev. Arthur Mursell. Nicoll always declared that in his student days he first realized the powers of impassioned eloquence through a visit of Mr. Mursell to Aberdeen. 'Only once, although I have heard Mr. Gladstone's finest efforts, have I seen an audience fairly set ablaze, and that was under a sermon by Mr. Mursell. The sermon was a terrible arraignment of the Church of Rome, and the orator piled climax on climax till people turned and gazed upon each other in their pews. The closing words "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, is fallen!" ring in the ears of some listeners to the present time.'

In June, Nicoll lectured at Upper Chapel, Heckmondwike, on 'The Future of the Christian Church,' and in July he delivered the closing sermon to Dr. Campbell Morgan's Summer School at Mundesley.

During this summer Nicoll fell ill, as appears from the following letters, which also betray how his mind was harping on the question of a possible retirement.

*From Dr. Marcus Dods.*

EDINBURGH, *July* 30, 1906.

I am grieved to hear you have been ill again, but you seem to know how to get lots of work put in between coughs, and though you must be tempted to retire, yet, like Nehemiah, you are 'doing a great work.'

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

THE SPA HOTEL, TUNBRIDGE WELLS,
[*early in August* 1906].

You know perhaps that I have had a bad time. I had an attack of pneumonia which left me very weak. My wife and Connie insisted I should see a specialist. He said my bad lung had much wasted since 1885, and that I was overworking. I am better now, but hardly normal, and I think of retiring. I remember your letter about that. My opinion is that we should both retire at the same time, and the proper time is about sixty. After that, we shall not regret looking back.

*To the Rev. Dr. Rutherford Waddell, Dunedin, N.Z.*

WARWICK SQUARE, LONDON, *Sept.* 21, 1906.

I begin to look forward with some expectation and desire to a time when I can shake off the editorial collar. I should like very much if it could soon be, to have a few years of quiet at the end of life in which one might gather up the fragments and have a share of rest. What I dislike about my business is that I am compelled constantly to study and write about passing questions in which I have no real interest. However, this element of routine must come into every active career.

Nicoll had sufficiently recovered to visit Aberdeen in September and take part in celebrating the Quatercentenary of the University. There, on September 24, he presided over the Reunion of Students of his own class, 1866-70, and read a poem, ' 'Tis Forty Years Since,' which he had written for the occasion. In October he preached at Highgate Presbyterian Church and at Vernon Baptist Chapel, King's Cross, besides lecturing to the Frognal Literary Society. In December he spoke at the dinner of the Society of Women Journalists, of which his friend Mrs. Burnett Smith (Annie S. Swan) was then president.

In the autumn Nicoll published 'The Lamp of Sacrifice,' his last considerable volume of sermons and addresses on religious topics.

*To Dr. James Hastings.*

*Nov.* 23, 1906.

I heartily congratulate you on the new volume [of the 'Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels']. I think it almost the best book for preachers and teachers that I know of. It is certain to be a triumphant success. I am rather puzzled to know how to deal with it in the *British Weekly*. Dods is the man to review such a book, but I have offered to write an article in a lower key showing the practical value of the work. This shows a noble spirit on my part, for some of your writers have actually spelt my name Nichol, a thing which would justify the breaking off of all friendly relations, and active hostilities besides. However, the weather is mild, and I am trying to forgive you. It strikes me as very strange that so far as I can see none of your writers refer to Bushnell. Now I think Bushnell one of the most suggestive authors who ever handled the pen.

At this point it becomes necessary to mention what was known at the time as the 'New Theology.' After Dr. Parker's death the Rev. R. J. Campbell, of Brighton, was appointed to succeed him as minister of the City Temple in the spring of 1903. This gifted and fascinating preacher possessed a magnetic personality, and speedily gained great popular prominence. After two or three years, however, Mr. Campbell grew engrossed in the doctrine of the immanence of God. When that truth is exaggerated into Pantheism, it may easily imply the ignoring of moral distinctions, and Mr. Campbell seriously alarmed many persons who felt that he did not sufficiently guard his teaching against such an inference. In January 1907 Nicoll began in the *British Weekly* a series of trenchant leaders

on ' City Temple Theology,' which passionately denounced Pantheism and its implications.[1] In March Mr. Campbell issued his volume entitled ' The New Theology,' which Nicoll assailed with vehemence in the *British Weekly*. The questions at issue caught hold of public imagination, and were debated for months in the secular as well as the religious press. Dr. Gore, who was then Bishop of Birmingham, published a book on ' The New Theology and the Old Religion.' Happily it is needless to-day to rake over the ashes of an extinct controversy. Mr. Campbell eventually resigned his position at the City Temple in the autumn of 1915. Shortly afterwards he took orders in the Church of England, having first publicly withdrawn ' The New Theology ' from circulation.

Towards the end of January 1907 Nicoll, following what had now become his annual custom, took a holiday with his wife on the Riviera, staying that year at Antibes.

In March he read a paper at the Free Church Council meeting in Leeds, when Dr. Rendel Harris was President, on ' The Ritual Commission Report and the Duty of the Free Churches ' ; and also addressed the London Congregational Board on ' A Crucial Question for Ministers.'

Early in May 1907 came the tragic news that Dr. John Watson had died suddenly in the United States. To lose this dear and gifted friend, so radiant with vitality, impoverished Nicoll's own life to an extent from which he was slow to recover.

In December 1906 Principal Rainy died in Australia, and in May 1907 Dr. Marcus Dods, who wistfully described himself as ' a broken-down man of seventy-three,' was appointed to succeed Rainy as Principal of New College, Edinburgh. During the summer and autumn, however, he suffered from severe illnesses which caused no small anxiety to his friends.

[1] It was about this time that Nicoll declared to a friend, 'If I had my choice, I would rather my children were taught Sacerdotalism than Pantheism.'

*To Professor H. R. Mackintosh.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, *Nov.* 15, 1907.

I am deeply obliged to you for telling me about the sad condition of the Principal [Dr. Marcus Dods]. I could not tell you how deeply troubled I was about it. He is the best literary friend I ever had, and I think the best man I have ever known. But I fear from what you tell me there is not much hope.

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, *Dec.* 3, 1907.

You are most kind in writing about Dods. No letters I receive are read with more anxious solicitude. I am very glad there is some improvement, and I earnestly trust that it will continue; but it is no use disguising that the danger is real and great.

Happily, Dr. Dods made considerable progress towards recovery. In 1908, however, he felt it necessary to resign the professorship which he had held since 1889, though he was persuaded to retain his post as Principal of New College.

After the Liberal Government entered upon office and secured a huge majority in January 1906, Nicoll's public and political influence notably increased. He had played so prominent a part in opposing the Education Act of 1902, that his counsels and criticisms had special weight in the attempts made to amend the injustice of that measure. One after another these attempts were successively defeated by the House of Lords or by the action of the Church of England. Efforts to bring about an agreed settlement of the controversy also proved unavailing. Throughout this long and chequered struggle the editor of the *British Weekly* wielded his pen with conspicuous effect, to which the following letter bears testimony:

*From the Rt. Hon. Reginald M'Kenna.*

House of Commons, *Feb.* 27, 1908.

There is no paper which exercises a wider influence than yours. Indeed a recent Prime Minister

has been known to avow that there was no more powerful factor in creating and guiding opinion than your articles. In the case I refer to, perhaps the exact words used may have been ' misguiding public opinion ' ; but I need hardly say that I recognise not only the power but the permanent value of your organ.

In March 1908 the *British Weekly* began a striking series of articles entitled ' The New Socialism : An Impartial Enquiry.' These articles, written by Miss Jane T. Stoddart, showed a mastery of the whole literature of the subject and attracted great attention ; they were afterwards collected and published in a volume.

In April 1908 Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman resigned and Mr. Asquith became Prime Minister, with Mr. Lloyd George as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

In the same month Nicoll published a slender volume entitled ' My Father : An Aberdeenshire Minister.' In the preface he explained that ' the greater part of this little book was written under an impulse derived from Mr. Gosse's very remarkable record—" Father and Son."[1] In his brilliant and pathetic narrative Mr. Gosse describes the religious and literary training in a Puritan household of the strictest type. He lays stress on the manner in which his young life was cabined, cribbed, and confined, on the continual religious pressure brought to bear upon him, and on his father's refusal to face all the facts of science. During the same period I was brought up in a Scottish manse, and in an atmosphere of religious belief almost as rigid and quite as faithful and sincere as that of Mr. Philip Gosse. But the methods which my father adopted with his children were entirely different—so different that I have been moved to describe them. . . . Very little has yet been written about the obscurer ministers of the Disruption, and this is a humble contribution to the subject. I have in no way attempted a biography. My object has been to describe a

[1] This had appeared a few months previously.

character.' Perhaps Nicoll never wrote anything more moving than this brief appreciation of his father. Its pages are inspired throughout not merely by affection but by reverence and piety—in the old Roman sense of the word—and the restraint of the book is part of its charm and power.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

CLIFTON DOWN HOTEL, BRISTOL, *May* 27, 1908.

For myself, I still have the hope that I can hold on till sixty. That would be three and a half years or so. I may not manage it, for my burdens are heavy and growing and my strength less than it was. . . . I do not think I should leave London, but would move into a cheaper house. So many of our friends are here. But how little we can read even the near future! We ought to say 'If the Lord will, we will do this or that.'

I do not think my lung is worse, but the difficulty of breathing increases. I do not feel it when lying; but if I sit up long or walk, I feel it.

I have promised to give the Murtle Lecture at Aberdeen on November 1.

*To Professor H. R. Mackintosh.*

ST. PAUL'S HOUSE, WARWICK SQUARE, *Aug.* 15, 1908.

Well, I suppose it is true that the fifth act after seventy is always tragedy, and therefore it must be best to die in the fourth act.

At Lichfield, Dr. Johnson's birthplace, a statue of Boswell which had been presented to the city by Mr. Percy Fitzgerald was publicly unveiled in September 1908. Professor Churton Collins, who had promised to perform this ceremony, died suddenly from an accident. Nicoll consented to take his place and delivered a felicitous address [1] on the occasion. For Johnson himself Nicoll's admiration hardly fell

[1] Printed in the *British Weekly* of September 24.

short of idolatry. He had absorbed the literature of the subject, and he felt thoroughly at home in paying a tribute to Johnson's famous biographer. He claimed for Boswell that he possessed both genius and a good heart. 'Now genius is very rare; but the combination of genius with a good heart is very rare indeed. Johnson said of Oliver Goldsmith noble and merciful words, which he would have said of James Boswell: "Let not his frailties be remembered: he was a very great man."'

In the autumn of this year Nicoll published his biography of Dr. John Watson [1]—a task entrusted to his hands by the widow and children of his dead friend.

*From Dr. James Denney.*

15 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow, *Oct.* 20, 1908.

I have read your 'Ian Maclaren' with peculiar interest. How in the world you managed to get it done in addition to your other work I cannot imagine. I had no adequate idea of the crowdedness and want of leisure in Watson's life, though I remember your speaking of it when he died. What will impress most ministers, and many discontented congregations, will be his diligence as a pastor; though there are plenty of careless preachers, I believe most ministers have it more in their intention to take pains with preaching, and are readier to think visiting a concession to weak and unreasonable people. The difficulty in a city is to do both, especially when you consider (as Chalmers remarked) that only good preaching makes the minister's visit a thing prized; nobody wants an idle, inefficient minister perpetually dropping in. I sympathize very heartily with Watson's views on the degradation of public worship; that, I suppose, would be a subject you would have to write about in discussing the Church and the Kingdom. When the Kingdom

[1] 'Ian Maclaren: Life of the Rev. John Watson, D.D.' By W. Robertson Nicoll. Hodder & Stoughton, 1908. Sir Henry W. Lucy pronounced the book 'an ideal biography. No one else could have written it.'

is set against the Church, adoration and testimony are lost unawares, and few people seem sensible of the greatness of the loss.

I was very much interested in your chapter on 'Sentimentalism,' and your placing of Watson in the line of Rousseau and Richardson. It seems to need a very good man to be a sentimentalist without becoming nauseous. . . . Watson has with Barrie the happiness of never having done risky or offensive things in sentimentalism ; if Rousseau is their father, they do him credit which he did not deserve.

I see, in another book you sent, some Dublin man appealing to the Psychical Research Society for evidences of immortality. I wonder it never occurs to such people that you *cannot* believe in immortality, unless you first believe in something which deserves to be immortal ; and that to try to convince people of immortality by exhibiting the ongoings of 'Katie King' when the gas is turned down and the magnesium light is on—ongoings which deserve nothing but instant extinction—is not a hopeful process. There is something horrible and even loathsome in the stupidity of it, and though Watson might have called me an 'ignorant fool' for it, I should still say, 'O my soul, come not thou into their secret.'

That autumn Nicoll once more revisited his old University. He preached[1] to a crowded congregation in Aberdeen University Chapel on Sunday morning, November 1, and concluded his sermon with the following words : 'This is the message I bring to you after nearly forty years of absence. I have tried to speak a good word for Jesus Christ.'

On the afternoon of the same day he delivered the University Murtle Lecture, which was given in the Mitchell Hall of Marischal College to a thronged academic audience, hundreds being unable to gain admission. The lecturer chose for his subject 'Sin and Punishment : the Teaching of Hawthorne and

[1] The subject of his sermon was 'The Friendship of Christ,' and it appeared as a leader in the *British Weekly* of December 23, 1908.

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Browning.' Nicoll appealed to those two great interpreters of life for their verdict as to whether wickedness is a mere morbid fancy and retribution only a bad dream. For his purpose he analysed and discussed Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter' and Browning's 'Fifine at the Fair.' The first is a poignant tale of sin and remorse and expiation in Puritan New England. But 'Fifine at the Fair' ranks among the most dramatic and perplexing of the poet's works, and has too often been misunderstood. Nicoll set forth in his lecture perhaps the best summary interpretation ever offered of that difficult poem. He related it to its Prologue and to its Epilogue, and showed that, so far from being a plea for indulgence or an apology for sin, it pictures a tempted soul escaping in the end from the snares of the Evil One. In his judgment 'no poet of our race had so strong a hold of the Evangelical ideas as Browning had.'

His Murtle Lecture is noteworthy because it illustrated one of Nicoll's favourite theses. He contended that the modern authors who are acknowledged as masters in the lore of human nature continually assume and imply those suppressed spiritual postulates on which Christianity depends.[1] He appealed boldly to the dramatists and novelists, like Ibsen and Wagner and Balzac, whom our generation most admires. He claimed, for example, that the greater modern sceptics have agreed with the Christian Church in confessing the corruption of man's heart. 'The business of Ibsen has been to tear off the mask from the unbearable face of truth. His severest censors have gone from him with their glib optimism rebuked.' Nicoll believed that even the realistic school of fiction, monstrous as were many of its performances, had nevertheless made for righteousness by revealing the dominant power of evil in human life. He cited the prophets and poets of unbelief as bearing their witness to the ineradicable

[1] Max Nordau, for instance, wrote: 'The most important theological obsession of Ibsen is the saving act of Christ, the redemption of the guilty by a voluntary acceptance of their guilt. This devolution of sin upon a Lamb of Sacrifice occupies the same position in Ibsen's drama as it does in Richard Wagner's.'

sense of retribution, the inexplicable reality of remorse. But there is only one religion which dares to measure itself with retribution and remorse. And whatever else may be said about Balzac, Nicoll pronounced him 'assuredly the greatest of Christian novelists, by far the most profound interpreter of that mystery of expiation and redemption which is at the heart of Christianity.' [1]

It was characteristic of Nicoll's way of thinking that he habitually conceived of theology and philosophy and literature as parts of an organic whole. In every age men have striven to approach and to express in divers portions and manners that ultimate truth which is too vast for any single category to contain. Nothing pleased Nicoll better than to bring out the obscure relations and reactions between the authors of any period—whether they dealt with morals, or poetry, or metaphysics, or romance, or devotion, or dogmatic belief—to show how each in turn had been infected and coloured and moulded by the rest. Before we can do justice to a great teacher we must trace his spiritual ancestry. Thus Nicoll would illustrate how, for example, it was Coleridge who begat Maurice and Hort, and Maurice who begat R. H. Hutton. Similarly he pointed out [2] how the Devotion of the Sacred Heart in the modern Roman Church was curiously derived from the writings of the illustrious Puritan, Thomas Goodwin. For many years Nicoll was meditating an elaborate work along such lines as these, which would deal with the literature of the Victorian era in its relation to the speculative thought and the spiritual and ecclesiastical movements of the time. Of that literature in all its by-paths he himself possessed an astonishing and almost unrivalled knowledge. In an early letter to Dr. Marcus Dods, there occurs a revealing sentence : 'People think it unscholarly to make mistakes about the first or second century, but one may blunder in the nineteenth with absolute impunity. I think there is scholarship shown in accuracy about

[1] 'The Return to the Cross,' p. 93.
[2] See the *British Weekly* of June 9, 1898.

the nineteenth.' Some idea of Nicoll's general plan may be gathered from the following letter:

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*Dec.* 4, 1908.

I have begun my proposed book on the Victorian Literature. I start with English theology in the Victorian era, and run from 1837 to 1865. Of course I contemplate a second volume completing it. I have worked for many years at collecting materials, but a good deal of labour remains, and I have only a small fraction of leisure time. Still, I feel I ought to be beginning. There will be six volumes in all, I hope, of about 150,000 words each. Theology wants much more room than poetry, etc., because it must take in to a considerable extent Philosophy and other subjects. I am pretty clear about my plan, but I shall have to refresh my memory on many points. I begin at a time when the High Church movement and the Free Church movement were both strong and young. My general line is that theology has been affected in two ways: first, by returns to the past, like the High Church and Free Church movements; and secondly, by growing knowledge—(1) Criticism, (2) Science, (3) Philosophy, (4) Literature.

So the book will not be a mere collection of biographies and bibliographies, but I shall try to show why people were thinking such and such things at different times. I shall want often to consult you, and for any suggestions you can give me I shall be most grateful.

I feel very much my incompetency for the task, but I am pretty sure I can make at least a book of reference which will be useful to future writers. And the truth is that no part of the history of English literature has been as yet written carefully and fully.

The same project is summarized in another letter, written a month later to the Rev. George Eayrs:

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, *Jan.* 9, 1909.

It came upon me like a flash when I recently took to spectacles that it was time I had begun the History of Victorian Literature in six volumes. This I have long projected. It is a heavy job, six volumes of 150,000 words each. The first two will be on the theology and philosophy of the period. I have done an immense deal of reading for it, but I have to get my materials together and then dictate them in chapters, and so I shall have to confine myself to that and be happy if I can accomplish it. The comfort is it will be at least a valuable book of reference, as the facts have never been collected in anything like a decent way.

Yet another letter, dated January 30, 1909, to Mr. Robert Cochrane, of Edinburgh, says :

I am most anxious to get on with my History of Victorian Literature, for I know that if I do not work at it now it will always remain a dream.

To the lasting regret of those who knew him best, Nicoll never carried out this large design. Among his contemporaries hardly any one possessed finer and ampler equipment for such a task. Shortly before the War it seemed not improbable that he might lay aside the burdens of editorship, and give himself up to produce a historical work of lasting value. But the Kaiser broke into Belgium, and Nicoll's *magnum opus* remained unwritten.

In January 1909 Nicoll spoke on 'The Press, its Past and its Future' at the annual conversazione of the Edinburgh Branch of the Newsagents', Booksellers' and Stationers' Union. He also preached at Grange U.F. Church, Edinburgh, in connexion with the centenary of Dr. Horatius Bonar.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

[Hampstead], *Feb.* 2, 1909.

I should very much like if the *British Weekly* could do some service this winter in making people think

of the Church and their obligations to it and their duty to strengthen it in every way—if they could be taught the difference between the Church and an ethical club. You can do it well, and I hope you will. [1]

There is not very much the matter with me, I think, but I have been rather overworking, and my last day in Edinburgh, Monday, was a particularly sad one. From morning till night I was visiting friends who were in distress. What an array of sorrows I met with—cancer, bereavement, insanity, disablement, paralysis, bankruptcy, shame—all these. It takes it out of one to meet them close. And so I fell an easy victim to a bad cold. But I am hoping that we shall get to Torquay to-morrow and that I shall soon pick up. We shall have no Riviera holiday this winter, as my daughter's marriage is to be in April and this makes it impossible to go so far away. I am glad you are going to have a journey to Canada. It will do you good.

In March Nicoll received this final letter from Dr. Marcus Dods :

23 Great King Street, Edinburgh, *March* 7, 1909.

On looking back over the last twenty-five years I see how very much I am indebted to you for giving me opportunities and encouragement without which I should have addressed a very much smaller audience. Believe me that I am grateful, and that though I can write no more for you my connexion with you has been a very large part of my life.

*To Professor H. R. Mackintosh.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, *March* 13, 1909.

A man less morbid in the ordinary way than Marcus Dods I never knew. Nor did I ever know a better man, or indeed a man so good. It was a

[1] During the next few weeks Dr. Denney contributed signed articles on 'The Church and Worship,' 'The Church and the Gospel,' and 'The Church and Christian Character.'

great comfort to me that I received from him the other day a letter about our long connexion which cheered my heart. There has been never the shadow of a shade between us in a very trying, testing and constant relationship extending to close on a quarter of a century.

Six weeks later Dr. Dods passed away. His death came upon Nicoll as no ordinary bereavement. For many long years the two men had worked in unbroken and intimate friendship. Dr. Dods was a contributor to the first number of the *British Weekly* and to almost every subsequent number till his last sickness began. Nicoll wrote :[1] 'I had the unspeakable privilege of knowing him as one man can seldom know another. . . . He was the best friend and the most Christlike man I have ever known. . . . I have no hope of making up his loss or of finding such another friend again.'

In the spring of 1909 a happy family event occurred at Bay Tree Lodge. Nicoll's elder daughter Constance was married on April 29 to Lieutenant Elystan Miles, of the Royal Garrison Artillery, son of the Rev. H. H. Miles, formerly rector of Clifton, Bedfordshire.

*To his daughter Constance.*

HAMPSTEAD, *Sunday, June* 20, 1909.

I am so sorry my letter writing has got so much out of gear. But I really and truly mean to write you every Sunday as far as possible. *Real* correspondence is weekly—or oftener.

Watts-Dunton says that my *Contemporary* article[2] is the only good thing done about Swinburne.

In May, Nicoll went down to Huntingdon and spent a week exploring St. Neots, St. Ives, and the Cromwell country.

[1] See 'Princes of the Church,' pp. 234-241.

[2] A memorial article on Swinburne (who had died in April), which Nicoll contributed to the *Contemporary Review* for June 1909, at the request of the editor.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

GEORGE HOTEL, HUNTINGDON, *May* 29, 1909.

I have greatly enjoyed the Low Countries. I am going to buy Brampton Manor and settle down here. One of the conditions of sale is that no other editor or publisher shall ever enter the door. Two dogs of ferocious character and disposition are kept with a view of imposing this. One of them is supposed to be slightly mad !

Strict Particular Baptist Chapels [1] abound in this district, so you may imagine I have been greatly cheered.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*July* 30, 1909.

I was very pleased to receive your long and most interesting letter [2] to-day and also the article. . . . It seems to me that the article is too unqualified in its conclusions, but it will do good as calling attention to the other side. I seem to see occasions when the Christian Church is called upon to take a side in politics as a Church, and I think it is an omission that you do not sufficiently insist on Christians taking part in politics. But in the general trend of your article I am at one with you.

I am an Imperialist for the reason that I think the union between the Mother country and the dependencies is on the whole good for both. I saw something of the Colonial editors when they were over here. I found them far more in sympathy with Liberalism than I had expected, but I found them also alive to the fact that not one of the Colonies, with the doubtful exception of South Africa, could stand alone. Also, without the Colonies what would we in this country be but another Holland ? This I should regret. Whatever our faults be, it is surely better that Canada

[1] See Appendix II.

[2] Printed in 'Letters of Principal Denney,' pp. 138-143.

should be ours than that it should be part of the United States, and that Australia should be ours rather than Germany's. The awakening of China may be some way off, but it will surely take place, and when it does take place we shall have something to think about. . . .

I think it may be taken as certain that George Adam Smith will get the Principalship at Aberdeen, though it seems too good to be true. . . . Smith would be a loss to the Church in some respects, but I think that in the Principalship he could do more for the Church than he is doing now. He would be a very valuable force in the North. . . .

I read with interest what you say about Meredith, Homer and Goethe. Meredith is pretty bad, but I think I can now understand nearly all his verses. He has a language of his own and one has to get the key. About 'Wilhelm Meister' I have long been convinced that it is a book for certain moods, and is useless otherwise. To Carlyle at one stage it came as a revelation, and I could almost say the same about myself in a measure. And yet Carlyle could see objections that can be taken to it, and so can I, and so can others who have heard its message. Do not forget that Carlyle's mother saw into it and appreciated it. That is a fact I like to think of.

We are now in the thick of a fight about the Budget. The main point is the taxation of unearned increment on land, which is being fought by the moneyed classes with fury. On this point I am whole-heartedly with the Government, and have even found a kind of pleasure in writing political articles—a thing I almost always detest. The forces appear to be pretty equally matched. But the Liberals are getting into heart again, and they really have something to fight about. In all likelihood the House of Lords will throw out the Budget and risk everything. So we shall have lively times to look forward to. I am glad of it, for I like a good hot controversy if I am sure of my side.

In July Sir George Riddell took a party of journalists and others down to Cardiff to see the Pageant and visit the ' Western Mail ' works. Nicoll was included among the guests.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

*July* 30, 1909.

We had a very successful day at Cardiff, and were made much of by the Mayor and other dignitaries. The train ran record speed, but it was not far from three hours each way. The Pageant lasted three hours. No power on earth will persuade me to go to see a pageant again. We were all dead-tired, and I have not nearly recovered, but it was a great success. The Welsh people are really very demonstrative, and I was made as much of as if I had been an Alderman. Riddell was simply grand, but I will tell you about it on Wednesday.

## CHAPTER XX

### RECOGNITION

During October Nicoll received a letter from the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, offering to recommend him for a knighthood, and his name appeared in the list of honours on November 9. The announcement was widely welcomed. Journalists and men of letters rejoiced at this recognition of a master in their craft. Nonconformists felt that—to quote the words of Silvester Horne—'your honour adds a cubit to the stature of all of us who are good Free Churchmen.' The *Daily Chronicle* wrote :

'Sir William Robertson Nicoll has thoroughly earned the distinction conferred upon him by the King. In addition to being a consummate journalist he is one of the most scholarly and versatile of our literary critics, and certainly our greatest bookman. He is also an author of distinction in more than one branch of literature, theological, biographical, and literary. He is associated with one of the largest publishing houses in London—Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton.

'For many years Sir William Robertson Nicoll has been the intellectual leader of Nonconformity—the chief exponent of its thought, and the most effective advocate of its cause in the press. Both as a speaker and writer he has been looked to for guidance by the Free Churches.

'Sir William Robertson Nicoll has shown great capacity and acumen as a writer on political affairs. His editorial articles in the *British Weekly* on the Education question and on the Budget have been the most powerful and trenchant that have appeared

in the press. These articles have not only been marked by literary distinction but have had also all the fervour and force of an enthusiast. It is no exaggeration to say that they powerfully influenced public opinion.'

Dr. Jowett wrote from Birmingham: 'It is a welcome thing that sometimes a public occasion provides the opportunity for discharging a private debt. I am one of your many debtors, and year after year increases our obligation. . . . I hope you will hear to-day the cheers of a vast multitude rising in every part of the land. You have been "the helper of many," and your honour concerns us all.'

Dr. Alexander Maclaren in the retirement of his old age wrote from Edinburgh:

> I am one of the great host of congratulators and well-wishers. I am very certain that no one of the new knights will have near so many. You belong to so many of us, and so many different sets feel as if a touch of the King's hand flickered past them. You have well earned it, and it will not spoil you. So we shall all be proud of you and take fresh heart to 'stand by the bonnets o' blue.'—Yours affectionately, ALEXR. MACLAREN.

Another veteran, Mr. D. C. Lathbury, formerly editor of the *Guardian* and of the *Pilot*, wrote:

> Knighthood is an honour which, more than most, seems proportionate to the causes for which it is bestowed. It is very little when the recipient owes it to the fact that he was mayor when the King opened a new town hall, and a great deal when it comes as an acknowledgment of hard and good work. No one had a better claim to it than you on that ground. The amount, the variety and the quality of your work are a constant marvel to me.

Nicoll received indeed showers of congratulations—including formal resolutions from a Baptist Associa-

tion in New Zealand and from the Committee of the Savage Club.

*To his daughter Constance.*

ROYAL YORK HOTEL, BRIGHTON, [*November* ?] 1909.

I have been hobnobbing with all manner of august persons, but am the same 'active lively savin' creetur' as ever.

Much love from

THE HAMPSTEAD CENTENARIAN.

Letters to this daughter often concluded in a similar quaint and affectionate fashion. Thus he wrote from Bath in 1901 : 'Good-bye, my dearest best girl, Your ever loving JUDGE JEFFERIES.' From Buxton in 1907 : 'Dearest love to my dear good sweet daughter, From her AGED PARENT.' From Hampstead : 'I have a lot of letters to do, so I just send you my love, my dear girl. Your loving THE ASSYRIAN.'

In November the Budget, which had passed the Commons by a majority of 230, was rejected by the Peers by a majority of 275. A General Election followed in January 1910, when 274 Liberals, 42 Labourists, and 82 Nationalists were returned against 272 Unionists, and the fierce political struggle over the Parliament Act began.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*Jan.* 31, 1910.

Personally I am quite satisfied with the result of the elections. Lloyd George and Churchill calculated on a Coalition majority of 140—20 more than they have won ; but the Cabinet was quite prepared for the Irish holding the balance, and I have great confidence that Asquith will conduct the negotiations with the King firmly and suavely. Scotland has done nobly. But we must re-organize the Liberal Press, and it can now be done far more easily than it could have been done ten years ago. I hope to have a hand in this.

During this winter I have been somehow more occupied than usual, though it is hard to tell how.[1] . . . I suppose my time was eaten up with political talk. This kept me from writing to you as I wanted to write.

I wanted to tell you that during the autumn holidays I came to what is for me an important resolution, and took an important step on my return. My wife and I decided that we could afford to give up the *British Weekly*.[2] In order that the publishers might have full notice I gave them two years' notice as from November. Should I be able to go on these two years I should then have completed twenty-five years' service and I should be just past sixty. After that I cannot expect much working time, and I am particularly anxious to carry out some literary business, and especially my History of Victorian Literature, which will be a large book extending to five volumes at least, each containing about 200,000 words. I have accumulated material for many years but have not put it in form. It is not so much a critical book, but it will contain a great deal of information. I do not propose to break my connection with Hodder & Stoughton, but should remain literary adviser and editor of the *Bookman* and the *Expositor*. I feel that I am entitled to get freedom from the continual strain of the *B.W.* It takes up about nine-tenths of my time and leads me often into things in which I have very little genuine interest. However, as it has been successful I have felt bound to it, but I think I have won the right to resign it. When I do resign it, I shall not take any part in it but leave it free for my successors. I have often wondered whether I did right or not in starting it.

You have been so kind a friend to me and so much interested in my little doings that I know you will be interested to hear this.

[1] It is the judgment of his secretary that Nicoll never worked harder than during 1910.

[2] It will appear that this decision was never carried out.

Early in February Nicoll spent two or three weeks at Bordighera.

*To his daughter Constance.*

[Mrs. Elystan Miles, on the death of her father-in-law, the Rev. H. H. Miles.]

HAMPSTEAD, *March* 19, 1910.

We heard about Mr. Miles, and were very sorry but not surprised. I like to think that the last time he was here we sang 'On the Resurrection morning.' That is the truth about Death.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*March* 31, 1910.

Many thanks for the review of Schweitzer,[1] which I like very much. He is evidently a remarkable man, but I cannot say that I make out his position with any distinctness. Do you know anything about him personally? Anderson Scott, who was here the other day, tells me that he has gone out to be a foreign missionary. If so, he must think he has something to say. Also he told me that Schweitzer had written the standard work on Bach, the musician, and that he is a great authority on music. There is something about him which is not in Strauss. I quite agree with him as to Strauss's extraordinary ability, and the story of his ill-fated marriage shows that he must have had passion; but I always felt that some essential element of human nature was wanting in him.

This year Nicoll went north as usual for a summer holiday, and stayed with his family at Lumsden from August 11 to September 3.

[1] 'The Quest of the Historical Jesus. A critical study of its progress from Reimarus to Wrede.' By Albert Schweitzer. Translated by W. Montgomery, with a preface by Professor F. C. Burkitt. A. & C. Black, 1910. Dr. Denney's review appeared in the *British Weekly* of April 7, 1910.

*To his daughter Constance.*

HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 1910.

I have been extraordinarily busy, and have ready :

1. ' The Round of the Clock.'
2. ' Sunday Evening ' : 52 Sermons.
3. ' Poems of Emily Brontë.'
4. ' The Expositor's Greek Testament,' Vols. IV. and V., completing the work.
5. ' The Expositor's Dictionary of Texts,' Vol. I., with Miss Stoddart.

I am struggling with proofs.

For a number of years while Dr. Burnett Smith was practising in Hampstead, his patients included the household at Bay Tree Lodge, where he and his wife (' Annie S. Swan ') were on terms of intimate friendship. In September 1910 they suffered the tragic loss of their only son, a schoolboy, who died from the effects of an accident.

*To Dr. Burnett Smith.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 22, 1910.

MY DEAR BURNETT SMITH,—Never but once in my life had I such a shock of surprise and pain as came with your most sad news. Dear Eddy ! I always loved him—he was such a good, bright, happy, frank, kind boy—and to think that he has gone from you on the very threshold of his career, when day by day he would have been a greater interest to you, when he was showing such an all-round, beautiful promise. No, I cannot realize it ; again and again to-day I have laid down my book, and thought and thought and thought.

You must, my dear Friend, say very little at first. ' I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because *Thou* didst it.'

By and by you will be calmer : you will be thankful for the great gift bestowed : you will feel that he is not lost but gone before. Also you will hear

a new call to duty and to thankfulness for all that is still left you.

But oh, the turmoil and the misery and the heart-ache before you ! My heart bleeds for you and his mother and his sister.

Ever very affectionately,
W. R. Nicoll.

*To Mrs. Burnett Smith.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Sept.* 22, 1910.

My dear Mrs. Burnett Smith,—Just a line to tell you with how deep and true a sorrow I mourn with you. You were so rich I thought, with your children, and I know you had good reason for pride and hope in the lad who was stepping out on his life's journey with so many loving eyes fixed on him. And now—well, as to the now, 'Our love was untender and our sympathy imperfect and our care ungentle compared to what they have in Thy keeping, O Lord our God and their God.'

This is my faith about our crowned and sainted dead. We walk by faith, *not* by sight. And this great sorrow is a new and searching demand on faith.

Dear Mrs. Smith, many are praying that your faith may not fail, and they will be heard.

My love to dear Effie, for whom I feel intensely.

Very affectionately,
W. R. Nicoll.

In September at Bristol Nicoll delivered an address in Broadmead Chapel on 'Our Debt to Bristol Baptist College.'

In October he published two more volumes. One, 'The Round of the Clock,' was a collected series of articles by 'Claudius Clear.' The other, 'Sunday Evening,' consisted of 'fifty-two short sermons for home reading.'

That autumn Nicoll fulfilled two engagements in Edinburgh. On Friday, October 21, he lectured to the Edinburgh University Theological Society on

*Photo. Dover Street Studios*

NOVEMBER, 1909

'Thomas Chalmers: a Reconsideration.' On Sunday, October 23, he preached for the Students' Representative Council in St. Giles' Cathedral to a congregation numbering over 2000, of whom 1000 were students. Driving with him to St. Giles', his nephew, the Rev. Innes Logan, made some remark about the occasion. 'That sort of thing doesn't worry me,' replied Nicoll. 'What does worry me is my spectacles and my papers and my bands. They are perpetually getting lost.' He told another friend: 'I was never nervous in the pulpit. The only thing that makes me nervous is when many in the congregation are not hearing me. I have sometimes felt a little nervousness in after-dinner speeches.'

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*Oct.* 25, 1910.

I have been in Edinburgh for three days, and therefore I saw a good deal both of the Established Church professors and our own, and also various Church leaders. They were all very kind and pleasant, but my impression is that the Established Church is asking more at this Conference [1] than can rightly be granted, or than will be granted by our people. I was greatly struck with the ability and suavity with which MacEwen stated our case in argument. Also I had a long time with old Dr. William Mair. His plan would I think be accepted, but as far as I could make out at present his solution is simply that the Established Church should get everything that it has, including all legal privileges, also that it should get spiritual independence.

I spent three days with Whyte, who is wonderfully well. You are his great enthusiasm just now. . . . He is not conscious of any physical decline.

Early in November Nicoll was the special guest at a dinner of the Authors' Club, where he gave an address on 'Literary Reminiscences: 1886-1910.'

[1] On Presbyterian reunion in Scotland.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

ROYAL YORK HOTEL,[1] BRIGHTON, *Nov.* 30, 1910.

Do not worry yourself either about trade or about the Election. As to the trade you will come all right in the end, and so with the Election. I still think the Liberals will get in, but even if they don't they have a splendid chance, and perhaps a better chance than if they got in. Think of Balfour jettisoning Tariff Reform ! Think of the difficulties the Tories would have to face. Think of the chances the Opposition would have. We must fight the fight fair and stand by our colours. But if I were searched to the deeps of my heart, I should scarcely know on which side I should wish victory to fall. At any rate, you and I know very well that politicians on either side have done nothing for us, so keep quiet. The simple life can be lived, as I am given to understand, on £200 a year. I hope I shall not have to try it, but I may.

Did you know that I have been authoritatively requested to become candidate for the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen ? I need not tell you what I replied.

We have had a very good time here, at the best hotel I know ; only there has been a great deal to write.

In December a General Election took place on the Parliament Bill. The new House of Commons contained 274 Liberals, 42 Labour men, and 84 Nationalists, against 272 Unionists.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

[This very close friend of Nicoll's had just lost his wife, who died on December 14, 1910.]

GRAND HOTEL, BIRMINGHAM, *Dec.* 1910.

My thoughts have been with you all day, and before I go to bed I must write a line to you. In

[1] This was the earliest of Nicoll's many visits to a hotel which he thoroughly appreciated.

your widowed home, in your loneliness, you will be in the company of a multitude of thoughts—of the past—the present—and the future. At such a time one cannot think with balance : the sorrow drains everything. But you will have strength from above. Unless all our lives and all our experience have been false, we sorrow not as those who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and being sure of that we are sure of all.

But you have days ahead of great stress and strain. You do not need me to tell you of the power of prayer—and I think ejaculatory prayer does a great deal at such a time. But you must to the best of your power go on with your work and avoid loneliness as far as possible. It is the lonely brooding that is by far the most dangerous thing.

I know you will pardon me for speaking so frankly: I have been through it all, and nobody knows what it is but those who have been through it. As Richard Baxter said when his wife died : 'I will not be judged by any that never felt the like.'

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

GRAND HÔTEL DES ANGLAIS, MENTON,
[*end of January*] 1911.

My thoughts have been very much with you, my dear friend. I think the time after the funeral is the worst. The excitement and the sympathy carry one away—but afterwards the loneliness, the great hard desolation, come down upon one and seem too much. I am so thankful you have your children, and Ella especially, as she can be with you. My children were only an additional care at the time [when I was bereaved], but it is not so with you. Yet when all is done that human love can do, we are cast on a Higher Strength. I feel sure that work, however distasteful, is a great help. Also change, when one feels able for it. That takes time however. We should like you very much to come to us at London when you can. You could talk to me more

freely perhaps than to any, and it would be a little help. But it was at least a year before I felt any better. 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' What more can we say?

I have a solemn feeling that for you and me the closing chapter of life has begun. We have shared in the greater experiences and have known the meaning of love and labour and death. Shall we not both be thankful that we have been brought thus far without shame—that we have kept the faith—that we have had many rich and undeserved blessings—that in spite of our bitter trials life has been kinder to us than it might have been? I have no desire to continue working hard; if I could see a clear way out I would take it, and spend the rest of my time quietly in a few tasks I should like to complete. But it is not easy to get out of the coil. We shall be guided.

I want you to write to me as often as you can, and I will faithfully promise you to respond at once.

With love to you and Ella, your very affectionate old friend,

W. R. Nicoll.

More than forty years! 1870-1911.

Early in the year a printers' strike caused anxious trouble in London, and seriously affected Messrs. Hazell, Watson & Viney, who had for many years printed the *British Weekly*. On March 16, Miss Coe, Nicoll's secretary, wrote to Lady Robertson Nicoll:

'Last Friday afternoon at the Devonshire Club Sir William met a deputation from the London Society of Compositors, asking him to use his influence in getting Hazell's men reinstated, now that they had conceded the fifty hours' week which was what the strike was about. He engaged a private room and ordered tea with buttered toast, which the deputation enjoyed very much. Then they had a very candid consultation, which has resulted in the strike being completely at an end now, so that we can have thirty-two pages in the *B.W.* whenever we like.'

In April, Nicoll delivered the Carey Lecture, at Belvoir Street Baptist Chapel, Leicester. His subject was 'Jesuit Missions: Lessons and Warnings.'[1] On returning home he made this comment: 'I don't think the Baptists liked my lecture much. They thought it was too favourable to the Roman Catholics. They were very attentive, but it was an intensely Protestant audience. What they really enjoyed were the bits when I was down on the Jesuits.'

*To his daughter Constance.*

HAMPSTEAD, *April* 28, 1911.

I have been terribly and frightfully chivied. Miss Stoddart is away, and I did last week 17,000 words which really drained every drop. Now I have to begin it all over again.

During the early months of the year the *British Weekly* emphasized the need for strengthening the links which bind children to the Church. For this purpose Nicoll advocated a 'League of Worshipping Children.'

At the close of the session at New College, Hampstead, in June, Nicoll gave a highly characteristic address to the students, which he entitled 'Mr. Fritterday.'

The following notes, dated August 6, 1911, have been preserved of Nicoll's conversation, after Bishop Paget's death.

'The Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Paget, was the best preacher in the Church of England and the last man to have the grand style. Is there any Anglican preacher left who has that style? There used to be Liddon, Church, Holland in his early days, and Furse when he tried it, and old Archbishop Alexander. A page of Paget, as a piece of English, would be much superior to Inge. Dale had the grand style eminently. Not many Nonconformists have it. Denney has it to some extent. Simpson, of St. Paul's, has a little of it,

[1] Published in pamphlet form by the Baptist Missionary Society. In a long critical notice of this lecture which appeared in the *Month* for May 1911, the reviewer concludes: 'But the great fact remains—he has meant to be fair, and to that we return with gratitude.'

and G. G. Findlay has a little. Spurgeon had it, especially on the first page of his sermons. Of course there are plenty of good styles besides the grand style. I would not say that Newman had the grand style, but he had a very fine style of his own. Ruskin at his best had the grand style in a very eminent manner. The grand style is Burke's. It lends itself very much to the proper use of the Bible. Bunyan was a tremendous master of the grand style.'

During the summer of that year the country passed through what amounted to a revolution, happily without bloodshed. In August the Parliament Bill, after a long and fierce struggle, was finally accepted by the House of Lords and became law. The same month the country experienced organized labour trouble on a great scale. A general strike among railway men well-nigh paralysed traffic, and troops had to be called out to guard London railway stations. Mr. Lloyd George took a leading part in the negotiations which brought about a settlement of the dispute.

In September, after his return from Aberdeenshire, Nicoll gave an address at a National Conference of P.S.A. Brotherhoods and kindred societies, which met in Whitefield's Tabernacle, Tottenham Court Road.

The following letter was written to W. A. Leslie Elmslie, Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, on hearing that he was engaged to be married.

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, *Sept.* 13, 1911.

I send you my heartiest and warmest congratulations on the good news you have sent me. Of course it was no news to me—I am a journalist. I heard about it probably before it took place—but I was not going to say anything before you did. . . . I have a lurking feeling in my mind, however, that you ought to have consulted me first, but I will try to dismiss it !

I have corrected the first proofs of your father's [1]

[1] The late Professor W. G. Elmslie, a memoir of whom had been published by Nicoll in 1890. A new and revised edition of this book appeared in 1911.

Life, and I have sent them back for a second proof. All I have added is some paragraphs upon your father's early advocacy of socialism, which are of peculiar interest now. When your father was living we all smiled benevolently over his socialism, but we now see that he saw further into the future than we did.

Early in October Nicoll travelled north to Montrose and spoke at a dinner given in honour of Dr. Hastings, the famous editor of Biblical and Theological Dictionaries, who had just resigned the charge of St. Cyrus U.F. Church to take up his residence in Aberdeen. That same month Nicoll preached the anniversary sermon at Vernon Baptist Chapel, King's Cross, and also addressed a meeting of the Clergy Home Mission Union in the Chapter House of St. Paul's. At the beginning of December he presided at a dinner of the Whitefriars' Club. On Christmas Eve he addressed the Hampstead Brotherhood in Heath Street Baptist Church, and took for his subject 'If it had not been for Jesus.'

In January 1912 Nicoll went to Cannes for two or three weeks. In March a general strike took place among the miners, and before long 1,000,000 of them were standing idle, besides 800,000 men employed in other industries depending on supplies of coal. Nicoll wrote on March 22 to Principal Denney :— 'I am afraid the prospects of a strike settlement continue very black, and I deeply regret that Asquith has not gone further to meet the miners. L. G. is on his back, which is a calamity for the nation at this time, for Asquith with all his merits is essentially a Balliol man, unimaginative and cold.' However, the Coal Mines Act became law by the close of the month, and this disastrous strike ended early in April.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*April* 12, 1912.

Many thanks for the reviews, and especially for your letter. I value the letters highly. They are

even better than the reviews, so please do not interrupt them on any account.

Lord Balfour of Burleigh has sent me the Union scheme of the Church of Scotland, with some explanations. At first blush it seems as if it were a generous and handsome proposal. It certainly goes further than I had been led to expect after talking over the subject with Established Church members of the Committee. If you have time, I should like to know how it struck you.

During the spring Mr. Asquith introduced a new Irish Home Rule Bill, which passed through the Commons, but was thrown out by the House of Lords. As a Scottish Presbyterian, Nicoll could sympathize with the Ulstermen's refusal to be placed under a government which would be predominantly Roman Catholic. He himself, however, agreed with the shrewd judgment expressed in a letter dated September 11, 1912, which he received from Canon J. O. Hannay ('George A. Birmingham'), an Ulsterman and a Home Ruler: 'No amount of fine language will persuade the Belfast people that they are not going to be bullied under Home Rule. Personally, I hold that there is no risk whatever of their being bullied, even by a government composed entirely of Devlins and Dillons. But I found this conviction not on any confidence in the present Nationalist party, but on the simple fact that no one in Ireland could bully the northern Protestants, who would hit back very much harder than anybody could possibly hit them.'

In April occurred the sinking of the *Titanic*, when among hundreds of others Mr. W. T. Stead was drowned. Nicoll wrote a warm tribute to his work and character in the *British Weekly* of April 25, 1912.

*To Mr. Albert H. Wilkerson.*

ST. PAUL'S HOUSE, WARWICK SQUARE, E.C.,
*May* 1, 1912.

I never could understand that awful mess of W. T. Stead's *Daily Paper*.[1] Stead seemed to me always

[1] Which appeared and swiftly collapsed in 1904.

to be dreaming of some millionaire who would give him *carte blanche*, and this prevented him from doing what he might very easily have done. He might have established a weekly with a world-wide circulation, and told immensely upon opinion. My violent dislike of the Spooks prevented us from having any really intimate intercourse for the last few years.

At the end of June, a leader in the *British Weekly* which foreshadowed a new Liberal programme of land reform and rural housing created considerable political sensation and was quoted very widely.

There was no other author in whom Nicoll may be said to have revelled, as he revelled in Dickens. Quite near the end of his life he wrote : 'You cannot have too much Dickens ; but "Pickwick," "Martin Chuzzlewit," "David Copperfield," and "Dombey and Son," are perhaps the best.' He used to say : 'I can hardly conceive of a person not liking "Pickwick." I don't think I would speak to him if I knew that.' He considered that Mr. G. K. Chesterton's two books on Dickens contain the ablest literary criticism by any living English writer.

Nicoll's devotion to Dickens was illustrated by the elaborate study entitled 'The Problem of "Edwin Drood,"'[1] which appeared in October. In preparing it he read practically all that had been previously published on the theme. He critically examined the main solutions which have been propounded, and the evidence on which they rest. His own conclusions were (1) that Edwin Drood was actually murdered by Jasper ; (2) that Datchery was Helena Landless in disguise. A final chapter discusses possible endings of the book which Dickens's sudden death left only half-written. The volume ranks as a singularly lucid and exhaustive piece of literary work. His friend

[1] 'The Problem of "Edwin Drood." A study in the Methods of Dickens.' By W. Robertson Nicoll. The preface is dated September 1912.

Shortly after Nicoll's death, a number of his articles on Dickens were collected in a posthumous volume entitled 'Dickens's Own Story. Sidelights on his Life and Personality.' With a Prefatory Note by A. St John Adcock. Chapman & Hall, 1923.

Mr. Clement K. Shorter pronounced it to be the best book Nicoll ever published. The following sentences occur in the preface :

' If there are those who think that the problem does not deserve consideration, I am not careful to answer them. It is a problem which will be discussed as long as Dickens is read. Those who believe that Dickens is the greatest humorist and one of the greatest novelists in English literature, are proud to make any contribution, however insignificant, to the understanding of his works. . . . We may agree in Mr. Gladstone's general conclusion " that no exertion spent upon any of the classics of the world, and attended with any amount of real result, is thrown away." '

The preface continues : ' In preparing this study I have had the constant assistance and counsel of my accomplished colleague, Miss Jane T. Stoddart. Miss Stoddart's accuracy and learning and acuteness have been of the greatest use to me, and there is scarcely a chapter in the volume which does not owe much to her.'

*To his daughter Constance.*

HAMPSTEAD, *Aug.* 8, 1912.

I have ' swotted ' very much and done Drood in a fortnight—nearly fifty thousand words. On the whole it is done to my mind, but it appeals to a very few. It is queer that it should be practically the only purely literary book I have published—and me past sixty.

During the course of 1913 Nicoll's public engagements appeared to thicken. He took a holiday at Cannes early in February. Then in March he visited University College, Aberystwyth, preaching their annual sermon to the Students' Christian Union and also delivering an address to the students on ' Patience.' The same month he addressed the annual meeting of the Booksellers' Provident Institution in Stationers' Hall, London, and also spoke at a dinner of the National Union of Journalists in Manchester.

In April the jubilee of the *Church Times* was celebrated by a dinner at the Hotel Cecil. Nicoll accepted the editor's invitation to speak at this festival, and showed a quite surprising knowledge of the paper from its first number. Later in the same month he presided at a Whitefriars Club dinner, and also gave an address in Essex Hall on 'Learning to Read' to the London branch of the National Book Trade Provident Society.

At a session of the Congregational Union early in May, he read a paper on 'The Church Dying and Rising Again,' with special reference to his favourite subject—'Worshipping Children.' Later in that month he gave an address on 'Christ the Seeker,' at the annual missionary meeting of the Presbyterian Church of England.

In June Nicoll unveiled a memorial tablet to John Foster, the famous essayist,[1] in Hope Baptist Chapel, Hebden Bridge, the place where Foster had been born in 1770.

Early in July 1913 Norwich held a festival to commemorate George Borrow, on the occasion of the gift to that city of the house in which he had spent his boyhood and youth. The speakers included Mr. Augustine Birrell, Mr. Clement K. Shorter, and Mr. Herbert Jenkins. Nicoll delivered an address in St. Andrew's Hall, taking for his text the words of Baron Taylor in 'The Bible in Spain': 'I have again the felicity of seeing my cherished and most respectable Borrow.'

At the Foundation Day of Mill Hill School, later in July, Nicoll distributed the prizes and addressed the boys on 'Winsomeness.'

*To Dr. Hay Fleming.*

HAMPSTEAD, *Jan.* 28, 1913.

Many thanks for your acute and learned pamphlet.[2] There is some very valuable matter in it, but

[1] His address on this occasion appeared in the *British Weekly* of June 19, 1913.

[2] The pamphlet in question was 'The Church of Rome and Marriage. By D. Hay Fleming, LL.D. Third and enlarged edition, with an authorized translation of the *Ne Temere* decree. Edinburgh: The Knox Club.

I think you fail to recognize that every religious society has a right to lay down its own law of marriage. If I mistake not, the Christian Church will yet have to fight for that.

*To Sir George Riddell.*

HÔTEL DE L'ESTÉREL, CANNES, *Feb.* 21, 1913.

A. J. Balfour has given me his new book to publish. He actually refused the terms I offered, on the ground that they were too high! This has happened to me only once before in a long experience.

The new book in question was 'Theism and Humanism,' the Gifford Lectures which Mr. Balfour delivered at Glasgow in 1914. They were published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton in 1915.

*To his wife.*

ROYAL YORK HOTEL, BRIGHTON, *April* 17, 1913.

On Sunday I had dressed crab for lunch—and had horrible nightmares. I dreamt that the Hon. Emily Kinnaird came for me in a black coal-scuttle bonnet and insisted that I should go in a taxi to Queen's Hall for the Y.W.C.A. meeting. When I got up, I said, 'Ladies and Gentlemen—the Y.W.C.A. is rotten.' All the company got up and went out, and I woke.

*To Mr. Frank Dodd*

[of Messrs. Dodd, Mead & Co., Publishers, New York].

HAMPSTEAD, *May* 7, 1913.

I was very pleased to hear from you, but very much disappointed that we were not to have the pleasure of seeing you at present. These intervals are too long for you and me, who are not so young as we once were, and I am extremely anxious that you should come over in the autumn.

Yes, as you say, we have each twenty years to look back in our friendship, and a great deal has hap-

pened in that time, better talked about than written about. Since we met I have discovered a place called Brighton. It is an old place : it is a watering place by the sea, and you can get at it from London in an hour. When you are over again I am going to take you there for a day or two, and motor you about, and deave you with anecdotes which you have never heard, and you will be pleased to hear that they have morals attached to them and are of an elevating character generally.

Your writer about Edwin Drood in the [American] *Bookman* means well, but please tell him with my best compliments that he is a dunder-headed ass.

Believe me, with kindest regards to all your circle,

Yours ever,

W. R. N.

I have made a discovery of a manuscript of Dickens which would make your brother's mouth water, and your own mouth water, and your son's mouth water, and your nephew's mouth water.

Nicoll had a special affection for Mr. Frank Dodd, who died early in 1916 and was commemorated by ' Claudius Clear ' in the *British Weekly* of January 20. A few weeks later Nicoll wrote : ' My dear friend Mr. Dodd—he was one of the two Americans I have best loved.'

During 1913 proceedings in Parliament often grew stormy. The Liberal Government's Bills for Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment, which the Peers had rejected in 1912, were reintroduced, while the report of the Marconi Committee occasioned bitter recriminations.

During his usual holiday in Aberdeenshire Nicoll wrote from Lumsden on September 2 to Sir George Riddell : ' I have hardly done any work of any kind, but have managed practically to re-read " Clarissa Harlowe "—the first time for several years. It is an extraordinarily big piece of reading — five huge volumes, but the ingenuity, the fertility, and the resource shown in it are marvellous.'

In November Nicoll preached for Dr. J. D. Jones at Bournemouth. The same month he published 'A Bookman's Letters'—his last and finest volume of collected articles by 'Claudius Clear.'

The following note has been preserved of a judgment which Nicoll expressed in conversation during the autumn of 1913 :

'Dr. Hunter said at Bournemouth that sixty was the best age for a minister. I saw his statement, and thought how foolish generalizations on these subjects are. It entirely depends on the man. Some men are dead and done with long before they are sixty. I mean, not another idea will enter their heads, and they are a perfect weariness to their churches. It depends on the man. But certainly you would say this—that, taking the average minister, a church usually has a chance with a young man. It has none with an old man. A church calls a student, and very likely he turns out poor enough, yet there is an element of hope about it. But when you take the ordinary minister at sixty everybody knows that his mind has long been hermetically sealed to every new form of idea.'

Here is another confession, made about the same date : 'I have never felt the least desire to go anywhere, to speak anywhere, to do anything. I have always done it against my will. I hate it more than ever.'

Before the year ended, however, Nicoll took part with special pleasure in a happy function at Hall Barn, Beaconsfield, where a number of distinguished journalists assembled to present an address of congratulation to Lord Burnham, the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday.

In January 1914 Nicoll spent two or three weeks at Mentone. In March he gave an address on 'The Child and the Church' at the meeting of the Free Church Council in St. Andrew's Hall, Norwich. That same month he dined at Lord Rosebery's, and on St. Patrick's Day attended the Irish dinner at the Hotel Cecil when Mr. John Redmond and Mr. Devlin

both spoke. Of this last function Nicoll recorded his impression as follows :

'I never heard better speaking than Redmond and Devlin—admirable in tone, spirit, firmness—free from all rancour, very confident, very quiet and very well phrased—both orators. I was particularly interested in Devlin. He spoke in the slow stately fashion of an orator, and really it was an intellectual pleasure to hear the way that he turned his sentences. Redmond practically read his speech, but with great vigour and looking up ; Devlin hadn't a note. What a pleasure it is to hear a man who can speak when you have heard a lot who can't—what a pleasure and relief it is ! '

During the spring of this year political passion over the Home Rule Bill ran dangerously high, and civil war in Ireland was freely predicted. Early in May the editor of the *British Weekly*, in a much-quoted article, declared that Liberals would never coerce Ulster, adding ' Let the Irish settle the Irish question.' In July the King summoned a Conference of the leaders of all political parties to meet at Buckingham Palace. This Conference, however, failed to reach any agreed solution of the Home Rule problem, and a fortnight afterwards the Great War had begun.

Quite early in the month of June Nicoll went to Edinburgh for the annual meeting of the Associated Booksellers of Great Britain and Ireland, and at their dinner responded to the toast of ' Literature,' proposed by Lord Guthrie. A few days later he visited Hastings, accompanied by Lady Nicoll, to unveil a memorial tablet to W. Hale White (' Mark Rutherford '), who had formerly lived in that town.

During June and July he wrote a series of leading articles in the *British Weekly* entitled ' The Difference Christ is Making.' [1]

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

*June* 13, 1914.

Don't worry because people muddle. People even prefer to muddle their own way than to be

[1] In the autumn these were collected and published in a small shilling volume.

ordered about or directed in the smallest degree. Take these words of age.

*To Dr. T. Matthews.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square,
*July* 29, 1914.

I am much obliged to you for your exceedingly kind letter. It is quite true that I long proposed to myself to retire from the editorship of the *British Weekly* when I was sixty. I did this partly because the labour is great, but mainly because I wanted before I died to write some books for which I have been preparing for many years. However, the *British Weekly* has been and continues to be so remarkably prosperous and I receive so many tokens of its influence, that I feel as if I should be deserting my post if I gave it up. And so I propose to stick to it as long as my health allows.

As for getting a successor the thing has occupied my mind very much for years, but I have not seen or heard of any one who seems likely to be satisfactory. There are no doubt a certain number of able journalists, but there are few journalists of ability who take any interest in Christianity or who would consent to write from the instinctively Christian standpoint. This being so, I think I am bound to do the best I can, though I am not able to make much progress with the book I wished to write—A History of the Victorian Literature, in five large volumes.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

[Hampstead], *July* 22, 1914.

My wife and I pay £20 extra a year to the Sustentation Fund of the U.F. Church of Scotland, and I shall be most happy to continue this arrangement.

I have been wonderfully well this spring and summer, but somehow I have been very busy. My leisure has been much taken up going to functions

*Photo. Walter Benington*

of various kinds—a thing which I do not like, but which in London it is very difficult to avoid.

You will sympathize with me when I tell you that my secretary, who has been with me twenty years, is leaving me for a husband.

To the last paragraph Dr. Denney replied :[1] 'I do condole with you on losing a friend and helper of twenty years' standing : it must be impossible almost to replace her. I hope you have had prevision of the event, and some one in training.'

For twenty years, Miss Coe, the secretary in question, had proved herself a most efficient helper and a most loyal and trusted friend. After the marriage of Nicoll's elder daughter in April 1909, Miss Coe had resided at Bay Tree Lodge on a footing to which the following letters bear their own testimony.

*From Miss Coe.*

BAY TREE LODGE, FROGNAL, HAMPSTEAD,
*Oct.* 13, 1914.

MY DEAR SIR WILLIAM,—I feel I should like to write to you and tell you how much I shall regret giving up working for you. I am afraid I am not very good at expressing myself, but I shall feel it intensely. I shall be literally tearing myself up by the roots when I leave. I have been with you for such a large part of my life that I never dreamt I should be the one to make the change. After all, you have taught me almost everything I know and a great many things which will be very helpful to me in my future life. I think I can say that I have always tried to be a help to you, and I cannot bear the idea of any one else taking my place. And yet I myself have made this possible. I am very glad that Evelyn Smith seems to be getting into the way of doing things rightly for you, but I knew what I was doing when I chose her.

I can never thank you adequately for your kindness to me at all times, but I want to express to you

[1] See 'Letters of Principal Denney,' p. 242.

a little of what I feel, and hope you will really understand.

Yours very sincerely,
MAUD COE.

*To Miss Coe.*

BAY TREE LODGE, FROGNAL, HAMPSTEAD,
*Oct.* 18, 1914.

MY DEAR MISS COE,—It was very good of you to write me so kindly, and I shall always value very much what you said. I am going to write you with equal frankness. Neither of us is very demonstrative, but there is a time to speak.

Yes: from the first day you were with me on till now—all those long and busy years—you have set yourself to help me. More and more I have learned to depend on you, and I have found you worthy of the utmost trust and regard and gratitude. You have been one of God's best gifts to me, and I cannot think without profound gratitude of the way in which you have cared for me in all my work with never-ceasing patience and understanding. I do not know how I could have managed without you, and I do not know how I shall manage without you now.

When I heard of your engagement I knew what I had to face. But I think you will believe me when I say that the uppermost thought in my mind was that you had richly deserved the happiness that had come to you. In fact I often wondered at the blindness of men, for I think you have all the qualities that bless and grace married life. At the best the work of a woman who depends on herself is hard, even though there are alleviating circumstances as I hope there were with you. I was glad that you should pass into the care of an English gentleman. I should have been a miserable churl had it been otherwise.

I set myself resolutely to make the best of things. After all, my work is mostly done. You, I hope and believe, have many years of happy married life before you. I can make no complaint: I have had

success and affection ten times more than I deserved ; no one was ever more kindly treated than I have been : and I have had you.

As I said, neither of us is effusive, but I do not think we have seriously misunderstood each other, or that we ever will.

You cannot think and I cannot say what the wrench has been to me. That Monday you were absent for the first time was a strange day for me. And so many things have come together.

But I still count on your continuous friendship. I hope to come to Harrow, but you know my capacity for paying visits ! But you will come to me—very often, I hope—and keep in touch with us. What I should much like when you are fairly settled is that you should come to us sometimes—often—on Monday, and stay to lunch as in old days.

This war has altered everything. One feels sure of nothing now. All the old foundations are shaken, and we do not know what we can keep. But friends must stick closer together while they may. I hope you will stay with us as long as ever you can.

Your ever grateful and affectionate friend,

W. R. Nicoll.

It was from Bay Tree Lodge on the last day of 1914 that Miss Coe was married to Mr. A. Wyatt-Smith, one of the masters of Harrow School.

Miss Evelyn Smith, who succeeded her as Nicoll's secretary, carried on the duties of an exacting post with equal skill and devotion until he died. Words can hardly exaggerate the value of her services, most of all when his health and strength began gradually to fail. Nicoll was extraordinarily fortunate in having two such helpers, who between them worked with him for nearly thirty years.

## CHAPTER XXI

### IN WAR TIME

THROUGH the spring and early summer of 1914, people in London were concerned mostly with strikes and militant suffragettes and Irish rebels. We went about our business and our pleasure in placid fashion—as men did before the Flood. Then suddenly the sky darkened and thundered, the earth rocked under our feet, the day of judgment had begun. For each of us the War became a supreme test : it searched his character and proved what stuff he was made of. By his bearing in the great ordeal every man betrayed what he had in his heart. Never did Nicoll play his own part more worthily than during those grim years of peril. The proud Highland blood in his veins leaped up to meet the German menace. His whole faith broke out into fire for the crusade. At the very outset he perceived the issues which were at stake. Great Britain declared war on August 4. In the *British Weekly* of August 6 Nicoll published a clarion leader, ' United We Stand,' and from that hour his one absorbing care was how to secure victory. To him as a Christian patriot nothing else seriously mattered. Now, as never before, he realized his calling and election. Surely he had come into the kingdom of journalism for such a time as this.

From the first Nicoll believed and urged (1) that the War was a righteous and necessary war, that we could not shrink from it without shame unspeakable, that at any risk we were bound to enter it and to play our part ; (2) that the War would be a terrible war, and possibly much prolonged ; (3) that the War would tax our whole strength and resources of every kind, and that we must be prepared to answer every call

made by our leaders to the very uttermost. He saw clearly, moreover, that our worst danger would be national disunion. Among Free Churchmen multitudes were by tradition and temperament averse from fighting, and he laboured incessantly to bring home to them their sacred duty. Above any other writer he had the confidence of Nonconformists, and no man did more vital service in rallying them unbroken to their country's call.

When Germany had outraged the common conscience of the world by openly repudiating all morality and all mercy, Nicoll found it difficult to tolerate doubters and shirkers. If young men pleaded that their own consciences would not allow them to draw the sword in any cause whatever, he pitied them when he believed that they were sincere. But he detested the heresy [1] of non-resistance. To him pacifism as a doctrine appeared not merely unchristian but immoral. He had nothing but scorn for sleek prosperous persons who quote the Sermon on the Mount to condemn all bloodshed, while they are busy laying up for themselves treasures on earth behind the shelter which soldiers must die to secure. All through the War Nicoll warned British Free Churchmen against the subtle falsehood of pacifism. And, on the whole, they stood like a rock. They came to see clearly that the War confronted every man with this alternative : he could use it either as an occasion for profiteering, or as an altar for sacrifice.

Personally, Nicoll was endowed with dauntless courage. Through all that long, slow, agonizing suspense his spirit never quailed. To read over again leader after leader which he wrote in hours of national peril, is to feel how ' in his hand the thing became a trumpet, whence he blew soul-animating strains.' Not the least part of his patriotic service was thus to fortify his fellow-countrymen during the darkest months of the dreadful conflict. By means of his friendship with Mr. Lloyd George and other politicians

[1] At the Reformation this heresy was explicitly condemned by every single Protestant Church in its Confession of Faith.

in high places he often had access to uncensored facts. Week by week his published 'War Notes,' signed 'W. R. N.,' were scanned eagerly for some inkling of what had happened or might happen soon. To quote his own words, 'We humbly claim to have written on the War not without knowledge, and with a constant and deep sense of responsibility.' He understood much of what may be called the underground history of the time, and he knew how close we came, not once nor twice, to ruinous defeat. But he carried in his bosom the gift of the morning star.

In the first fortnight of the War Nicoll brought his wife the following story: 'At a Cabinet meeting the other day one man got up and said, "If the Government goes in, I shall retire." Another one got up and said, "If the Government keeps out, I shall retire." Asquith calmly said, "Gentlemen, when you have all retired, I shall carry on the Government alone." '

During August, Nicoll went to join his family at Lumsden, but returned to London before long. The high spirit and temper in which he faced the War are vividly pictured in the following description by his friend and publisher, Ernest Hodder-Williams.

> We met for lunch, as was our custom every Wednesday, week in, week out for over twenty years, in a little room at the printers' office where he had just passed the *British Weekly* for press. He had hurried back from a much-needed holiday in his old home at Lumsden—hurried back for the fight. He looked tired, and I wondered if he had strength enough reserved against the days of trouble. We sat silent for a time, those pale mystic eyes of his, now clear, now cloudy, first questioning me almost fiercely across the table, then looking through me, past me, out beyond into the frowning future. I knew he saw terrible things, for he had fewer illusions about war than most of us, and far more understanding. He stretched out his hand, that very sensitive hand, and gripped mine. We stood

up, and then he told me of his faith, of his determination to see it through—'you and I together,' as we had seen through many fights together in the past. 'Never fear, we shall win—in the end. But we shall pass through deep waters.' There came into his voice the gentle, crooning note that came only when he was greatly moved. 'I have no fear,' he crooned. 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return.'

Then—with one of those sudden changes that never ceased to startle those who knew him best—in a voice like naked steel: 'I have no fear. The blood of my forbears watered the fields of Culloden.' It was true. He had no fear, and he knew the meaning of sacrifice.

In a few moments we had settled down to business, the urgent business of carrying on and defining the policy of a paper during the Great War. We discussed the details of ways and means. He was always intolerant of vagueness, and figures talked to him.

We saw the War through together as he had foretold. I know what I and mine owe to his glorious faith and courage during those years. I cannot measure what the Empire owes: it is a heavy debt.

*To Sir George Riddell.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Aug.* 30, 1914.

I came up here on Saturday night from Lumsden and had a good journey. The searchlights were turned on at the Forth Bridge and they examined the luggage, but beyond that everything was as usual. We did some motoring in Cromarty and Sutherlandshire, and had extraordinarily fine weather; but the hotels were everywhere practically empty, and the people were troubled at the apparently steady advance of the Germans into France. I have seen a good many people, but nobody who knew very much from the inside. Lord

Shaw came to see us on his way from Andrew Carnegie's where he had been with Lord Morley, but those two wiseacres[1] had spent their time in discussing the rights of the War. Lord Bryce, who arrived [at Skibo Castle] the day before Shaw left, said he had seen Kitchener immediately before he left London. Kitchener said to him, 'At first I put down the war to last three years, but now I make it out to last two years.'

I should like very much to see you. The news to-day is not good. It is hard to understand why our brave troops should be put against forces so greatly outnumbering them. And I find it also very hard to understand why Kitchener does not call in a more emphatic way for additional reinforcements. It would make you perfectly sick to see the young men loafing about the streets of Aberdeen. The conscience and intelligence of the country have not yet been touched, and I doubt whether Asquith's speeches will set the heather on fire. Lloyd George is our man for that.

On September 1, nearly all the daily papers printed 'An Appeal to Young Nonconformists, by Sir Wm. Robertson Nicoll,' in which he gave seven brief, pointed, telling reasons why all Nonconformists able to fight should enlist without delay.

*To his Wife.*

HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 2, 1914.

The Publicity Department of the War Office asked me to write the 'Appeal to Young Nonconformists' —so I did it on Monday, and it has been in most of the papers. You will see my article [in the *B.W.*].

This appeal Nicoll expanded into his soul-stirring leader 'Set down my name, Sir,' which appeared in the *British Weekly* of the same week. The leader was at once reprinted in pamphlet form, and had an immense circulation. The public effect produced by what he wrote is reflected in the following letter.

[1] Carnegie and Morley.

*From Mr. Coulson Kernahan.*

FAWNDENE, WEST HILL, HASTINGS, *Oct.* 13, 1914.

Your War and Recruiting articles are as great a service to the nation as any one has rendered this many a year. Perhaps only those of us who know something of the facts can appreciate your articles to the full. I admit that to me it came as a surprise that a great scholar, bookman, theologian, should have the genius thus to see directly into the great struggle and red heart of a world war, and so accurately foresee all the huge issues and the vast principles behind the mere details. I know what courage was required to speak out as you did—no pessimist, but not failing to realize the tremendous struggle before us. I doubt, as one who is a little behind the scenes, whether even you realize how great is the service you have rendered the nation.

*To his daughter Constance.* [Mrs. Elystan Miles.]

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 9, 1914.

I am glad Elystan is gone, and he will have my earnest prayers for a happy return. It is very hard for you, but it is a glorious and dutiful adventure and will be a source of great pride and comfort as well as of great anxiety for you. I am glad we shall be so near to comfort one another, and you have the Men.[1]

Nicoll's son-in-law, Major Elystan Miles, R.G.A., went out to the Aisne in September 1914 as Captain of a battery of heavy artillery; he spent two years fighting in Belgium, and served in France and Italy (with an interval of training cadets in England) until the end of the War.

At the City Temple on November 10, Mr. Lloyd George addressed a densely crowded assembly of Free Churchmen. Nicoll, who presided, defined his own position in unmistakable words. 'If we had not been

[1] This was Nicoll's pet name for his two little grandsons.

Christians, we should not have been in this War. It is Christ Who has taught us to fight for liberty, righteousness, and peace. It is He Who has taught us to care for small nations and to protect the rights of the weak, over whom He has flung His shield. That is why we are here to-day. The devil would have counselled neutrality, but Christ has put His sword into our hands.' Other speakers were the Rev. R. J. Campbell, then minister of the City Temple, and Dr. Clifford who declared that for the last three months he had been acting as a recruiting sergeant.

Early in 1915 Nicoll took a holiday at Bournemouth, his usual trip to the Riviera being impossible.

*To Mr. Clement K. Shorter.*

ROYAL BATH HOTEL, BOURNEMOUTH, *Feb.* 2, 1915.

None of my friends have come to see me, but Connie [1] was here for nearly a week. My mind has been quite stagnant. I perceive that London is the only place between me and complete idiocy, or shall we say—coma.

*To Sir George Riddell.*

ROYAL BATH HOTEL, BOURNEMOUTH, *Feb.* 2, 1915.

What I have found with pleasure here is the access to Thomas Hardy's country. Yesterday we drove to Wareham and Bere Regis through Egdon Heath (see 'The Return of the Native'). The road is probably the oldest in England—not altered since the days of neolithic man. It runs straight through great heaths on both sides.

*N.B.*—Hardy's description of Egdon Heath I think to be one of the three masterpieces of English prose style.

In the spring of this year it was announced that King George V. had given orders that no wine, spirits, or beer should be consumed in any of the royal

[1] His daughter, Mrs. Elystan Miles.

palaces while the War lasted. Like the *Spectator*, the *British Weekly* urged that the whole country ought to follow the King's example and adopt national prohibition as an emergency measure during the great struggle. Nicoll vehemently opposed the plan favoured by Mr. Lloyd George and many others—that the State should take advantage of the crisis to purchase and control the liquor traffic. And it was partly due to his opposition that this plan failed to take practical shape.

It should be said here that on the temperance problem the *British Weekly* from its beginning had steadily advocated a policy of prohibition. Three months after it was founded the editor wrote: 'To us it appears that temperance reformers should be satisfied with nothing less than the direct veto.' In those early days he even argued against compensation for publicans whose businesses might be suppressed.

Personally, however, Nicoll never pretended to be himself an abstainer. And many of his critics—together with some of his friends—felt that it was not very easy to reconcile this apparent inconsistency between precept and practice. Assuredly he had scant tolerance for the fanatics who denounce alcohol as poison. He understood how grievously the progress of the temperance cause in this country has been hampered and hindered by reckless propagandists. For no serious Christian can ignore the fact that Christ Himself deliberately refused to imitate the asceticism of John the Baptist. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, He was reviled as a wine-bibber, and He consecrated the drinking of wine when He made it part of His great Sacrament of fellowship.

Nicoll, however, looked upon prohibition to-day as a desperate remedy demanded by a desperate public disease. To him it appeared not as a gospel, but as a necessary expedient. His own inner mind on the temperance question may be gathered from the following sentences which occur in a letter, written to an intimate friend who was a stern and thorough-going prohibitionist.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Feb.* 19, 1894.

As to temperance . . . my feeling is that it all depends on 'the present distress.' We have got into such a mess that Christians are pretty well forced into a certain position. But . . . there is nothing absolute or permanent or ideal in the reformation. We want it to get out of this entanglement—that is all.

The terrible death-roll of our soldiers in France created a countless multitude of mourners. 'When the Wounded go Home' was the title of the *British Weekly* leader on April 1. Its words of strong consolation were reprinted and circulated very widely in pamphlet form.

Under the stress of war-time labours and anxieties, Nicoll's private correspondence seems to have grown more scanty; at least, fewer letters of moment have been preserved.

*To Professor A. E. Taylor*, of St. Andrews.

*May* [3], 1915.

I have no politics now. I am concerned only with the ending of the War. I can see that when the War is over parties will arrange themselves on a new basis. For example, I should be in strong favour of a heavy tariff on all German goods.

On May 7, 1915, the *Lusitania* was torpedoed, and later in that month the first Coalition Ministry was formed, with Mr. Asquith as Premier and Mr. Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions. The *British Weekly* of June 10 contained a bold editorial headed 'The Next Three Months,' which was full of grave warning and produced a deep public impression.

*To a Correspondent.*

*June* 11, 1915.

Women have come out extremely well during this War. We have received a great number of patriotic letters whenever we have written an article. So I am much reconciled to the Suffrage. The women see the thing in its true danger.

*To the Hon. P. Lyttelton Gell.*

*June* 18, 1915.

I have no politics at present, except the politics of getting to the end of the War.

*To an Irish Clergyman in Antrim.*

*June* 18, 1915.

I was very much interested in your letter. I have had for many years a sincere reverence for Archer Butler,[1] and I have learned much from him. I do not know how I could have missed your article in the *Church Quarterly Review*. Do you know an article which appeared at the time of his death in the *Christian Remembrancer*? I feel certain it was written by Archbishop Alexander, and, if so, it is the best thing he ever wrote.

I still possess many letters from Canon Hayman, and I have gone over in the old volumes of the *Dublin University Magazine* many of Archer Butler's contributions. The opinion I formed was that his poetry was no good. It is pleasant enough in its way, but it is not on a higher level than that of Sir Rowan Hamilton and others of the same kind. It is diffused Wordsworthianism. But many of the prose articles are excellent. . . . I can well understand that you found it a consolation to be in such high company as that of Archer Butler.

[1] Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Dublin, who died in 1848, at the early age of thirty-six. His 'Letters on Romanism,' Nicoll considered the most masterly criticism of Newman's Essay on Development.

*To Sir George Riddell.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *July* 9, 1915.

You will be interested to know that I spent yesterday afternoon with Lord Morley. Referring to Lloyd George and Haldane, he said, 'This is a fight of the sword-fish and the whale, and I put my money on the sword-fish.' I will tell you more if you turn up at the Presbytery,[1] but nothing if you don't.

To this we may append a letter written in September 1922 to Mrs. A. W. Blaikie, a descendant of Dr. Chalmers:

After the War had begun I spent a day with John Morley in his house at Wimbledon. He showed me all his treasures, especially in the way of books and illustrations. When I was going away he said to me, 'Now, I have kept the best last,' and pointed to a portrait hanging just over the door. 'That is the only piece of furniture,' said he, 'I took from my father's house. My father thought that Chalmers was a great Christian minister, and I think so too.' It was a very familiar portrait—the one where he holds the umbrella. My own father had no room for pictures, every inch of the space in his little manse being occupied by books, but he found places for three different portraits of Dr. Chalmers. So you see I have been well brought up—perhaps almost as well as you!

In August, Nicoll joined his family, who were staying in Aberdeenshire. He wrote: 'People here are listless and puzzled about the War. The sounds come muffled, and I have felt it a rest.'

*To Mr. Clement K. Shorter.*

THE OLD MANSE, LUMSDEN, *Aug.* 23, 1915.

I was very anxious about my son—fearing that he was on the transport that was torpedoed, but his name is not on the list. I have had no War news

[1] See p. 422.

to speak of. If Kitchener wants compulsion he will get it—but I don't think he does. There are a lot of shirkers here.

Nicoll's only son Maurice had taken a first-class in the Natural Science Tripos at Cambridge and studied also at Vienna and Zurich, and had begun practice as a doctor in London. He joined the R.A.M.C. in August 1914, and was at Suvla Bay landing, in charge of an ambulance. Later on he served in Mesopotamia, and after the War published a volume [1] describing his experiences there, illustrated by his own water-colour drawings.

*To Mrs. George Adam Smith.*

[Wife of the Principal of Aberdeen University, on hearing that their son, George Buchanan Smith, Gordon Highlanders, had been killed in action at Loos, on September 25.]

*Oct.* 6, 1915.

My dear Mrs. Smith,—I read the message you so kindly sent me with the utmost sorrow. I have loved all your children, but I hardly ever met a young man who drew out my heart so much as the dear boy whom you have been parted from for a time. He was so modest, so manly, and so wise that one could only envy and admire and love him. It is well, I am sure: but we walk by faith and not by sight—not by sight.

My own boy has come back from the Dardanelles half-dead. He had sixteen days of hell at Suvla Bay, where he landed and was struck down by fever.

With love to you all,

Ever yours,

W. R. Nicoll.

At the end of this summer the *British Weekly* began to publish regularly two or three columns of 'War Notes' signed 'W. R. N.'

[1] 'In Mesopotamia,' by Captain Maurice Nicoll, M.D. He has since published a work on 'The Psychology of Dreams,' and with his sister is the author of 'Lord Richard in the Pantry' and 'Cupid goes North.'

*To his daughter Constance.*

[Who had remembered that October 10 was his birthday.]

Royal York Hotel, Brighton, *Oct.* 1915.

Thanks for the birthday things, but birthdays are for little grandsons and not for me. Curiously, I thought it was Saturday, but it was Sunday. Well, it has been a long row to hoe, and I am thankful so much of it is done.

*To Miss Ada van der Poorten Schwartz.*

[On the death of her father Maarten Maartens, the well-known Dutch novelist.]

*Oct.* 14, 1915.

The news of your father's death came as a great shock to me. He had very great qualities of head and heart, and I had a true affection and admiration for him. To a man so exquisitely sensitive life did not come easily, and I think he must have had more than his share of the storm of sorrow which is sweeping over the world. Well, he is at peace though we are at war, and there is rest in the thought.

I am very sorry for you, dear Ada. I remember you as a child at Montreux, and I know that you were very very much to him, and he to you. I trust that the end was quiet and without pain.

I wrote a few lines about him in the *British Weekly*, which I asked my wife to send you. I shall try one day to write an estimate of the work to which he devoted himself so earnestly and in which he won such fame and honour. But now I can think only of himself. I am reading 'Dorothea' over again, and it constantly brings him back to me.

My most earnest and respectful sympathy to your mother. How strange it seems that he should have passed first!

Your affectionate friend,

W. R. Nicoll.

With his Grandson, in 1915

*To Mrs. Burnett Smith.*

[Whose home at Hertford had been wrecked by a bomb from a Zeppelin.]

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Oct.* 18, 1915.

MY DEAR MRS. BURNETT SMITH,—I can never tell you how shocked I was to hear of your experiences. I was at Brighton, and did not fully know till I came back on Saturday. It was so kind of you to write, and Effie's letter was splendid. What can I say? Every thought was swallowed up in thankfulness for your miraculous preservation—you and dear Effie and my good brave Doctor. I think this means that you were spared to carry on your great work in connexion with the War.

All things tremble under us—but we have a city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God.

With much love to you all,

Ever yours affectionately,

W. R. NICOLL.

Dr. J. D. Jones of Bournemouth, one of the sanest and most trusted among Free Church leaders, wrote to Nicoll on October 21, 1915, urging that to win the War national unity must be preserved at all costs, and warning him that there was a real peril lest the Cabinet—and the nation—should split on the question of Conscription. Nicoll replied promptly in the following terms.

*To the Rev. Dr. J. D. Jones.*

ST. PAUL'S HOUSE, WARWICK SQUARE, E.C.,
*Oct.* 22, 1915.

I think you are very imperfectly informed as to the things that have been taking place. No one has more angrily repudiated the idea of taking Asquith's place than Lloyd George himself. The charge has been brought against him frequently by his enemies

in the Cabinet, and has excited his warmest indignation. . . . In spite of this, however, he is still on friendly terms with Asquith, though no doubt he felt very much Asquith letting him down at Newcastle on the Drink question. He also felt that the Nonconformists should have helped him in that matter. As it is, the problem has by no means been solved, and he is deeply dissatisfied with the general action of the Committees.

What he has thought, and what I have thought, from the beginning almost is that the War is not carried on with foresight and with push. Asquith seems to have no control over the varied departments and to seek no control. The Prime Minister ought to hold them all in his hands and to see to their co-ordination. But Asquith does not do this, and the consequence is incalculable confusion and misfortune. I lunched lately with Lord Morley, and he said, 'Asquith is a fine fellow, but he will never carry this business through. He is much too casual.'

The difficulty Lloyd George had in getting proper powers in the matter of Munitions, and the opposition offered to him by Kitchener, were incredible, and the only thing that gave him the victory was that he distinctly declined to take office except under certain conditions. Office is no temptation to him except that he may serve his country, and if he is not wanted he will gladly retire.

I wish as much as anybody that the unity of the Cabinet should be unbroken, and I still think this may be possible. But it can only be if a firmer grip is taken of the business. If you look at what is being done for the protection of London from Zeppelins, you will see a type of the whole thing. Some of the responsibility is with the Home Office, some with the War Office, some with the Admiralty. Nobody knows exactly to whom he is responsible. When anything goes wrong there is nobody to blame. In the meantime nothing is done at all to protect the citizens of London, and nothing will be done.

You say that I should warn Lloyd George that the Nonconformists will not tolerate division. What does that mean? Does it mean that Nonconformists will not tolerate his leaving the Government? What does he care whether they tolerate him or not? Does it mean that he is not to express his own opinion on the conduct of the War, and do his best in private to get that opinion carried out? Surely you cannot mean this. Lloyd George is the very last man to whom I would address a warning. He has been, not only in my opinion but to my knowledge, infinitely the most useful member of the Government since the War began. There are plenty of warnings that might be addressed to Cabinet Ministers but none that I know to him.

And as for the Nonconformists, you know perfectly well that I have always been independent of them, in the sense that I have always given my own opinion whether it accorded with their opinion or not, and often it has not accorded with their opinion. But that is a matter which has never troubled me so long as I saw my way. It is not for the sake of money that I have done my work. And what a record the Nonconformists have in this matter! I remember year after year defending the Navy Estimates and being always abused in certain quarters for doing so. Where would the country have been if Nonconformist advice as to the diminution of the Navy and all that stuff had been carried out? We should have been defenceless and ruined long ago. And Nonconformity needs to be told very plainly that its place in English life will be lost if it fails to play its part in this War. Many have done nobly, but others have done very ill. Scotland, however, I am glad to say, is as one man.

Some sentences should be quoted here from Dr. J. D. Jones's reply, dated Bournemouth, October 25.

It was exceedingly good of you to write me at such length. I greatly appreciate your kindness in so doing. Let me say that I think you are a little less

than just to Nonconformists—so far as their attitude towards this War is concerned. The so-called ' Pacifist ' group is negligible. Most of our ministers have given their sons quite freely. We have not taken a census, as the Church of Scotland did, but I don't think we should come far behind. I have had to write to many manses to condole with our ministers over sons who have fallen. My own son lies at this moment in Netley, wounded for the third time and this time rather badly. I only mention this to show that we are in grim earnest in this business. . . . It is just because I want to see the War carried on with determination and vigour that I ventured to write to you. In spite of your disclaimer you *do* speak for us. Many of us feel that you are our one voice in the public press. And it is because I thought and still think that our national unity is in peril that I took upon myself to write as I did. . . . We can only fight this thing through by being united. We are heading straight for disunion if we don't mind, and disunion spells disaster.

Many of the gravest difficulties in conducting the War arose out of its sheer magnitude. Never before had such an emergency strained the utmost resources of the Empire. For the first time our War Office had to recruit and train millions of soldiers, while guns and munitions and equipment and food supplies had to be provided swiftly on a scale to correspond. Experienced officials grew bewildered by these overwhelming demands upon the machinery of the State. It was well-nigh inevitable that the result should be disastrous confusion and tragic blunders and heartbreaking delay. No man realized the national peril more vividly than Mr. Lloyd George. Ceaselessly, by speech and action, in public and in private, he fought against official inertia and routine. There were times, indeed, when he half despaired of success, and took counsel with his friends as to whether he could not do greater service towards winning the War if he were to leave the Cabinet.

Nicoll's intimate contact with high political affairs throughout this period is illustrated by a letter, marked 'most private,' which he wrote to Ernest Hodder-Williams on October 29, 1915. In the letter he describes 'the most tremendous and fateful interview of my life,' which had taken place that afternoon. It was at Sir George Riddell's house in Queen Anne's Gate, where Nicoll had been invited to lunch with Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Reading, the Lord Chief Justice. Mr. Lloyd George told his friends that he wished them to hear the reasons which were moving him to resign his post as Minister of Munitions. 'He spoke for nearly an hour, piling up one fact above another to show that Kitchener and the War Office had made every mistake conceivable, had cleared out all the able men, and had got us into such a case that we may well lose. . . . Asquith, Balfour, Grey profess the greatest contempt for K., but they give in because they think he has popular opinion on his side. . . . Kitchener, who has lost the munitions and the recruiting, is now more than ever dominant in what is left.'

The three friends whose judgment Mr. Lloyd George thus invoked all agreed that he ought to make his position perfectly plain to the Prime Minister, and to resign if nothing were done to mend the state of things at the War Office. Nicoll adds: 'I never gave advice with a clearer conviction.'[1]

Describing this interview the same evening, Nicoll said, 'The air was heavy with fate. Outside, the fog was creeping up, and in the half-gloom one could see L. G.'s strained, tense face. I wondered as I listened whether we were going to win the War.'

Something was done, however, and done promptly. Early in December 1915 the War Council of the Cabinet was constituted, and a strong General Staff set up with General Robertson as its Chief. Sir Douglas Haig succeeded Sir John French in the British Chief Command in France, and the Allied

[1] An instructive commentary on the situation indicated in this letter occurs in Dr. Addison's 'Politics from Within,' vol. i. pp. 74-8.

expedition withdrew from Gallipoli. It was during that winter that the Allied peoples began to realize the quality and magnitude of their task.

The following was Nicoll's answer to a letter from a reader of the *British Weekly*:

*Dec.* 20, 1915.

I am most grateful to you for obeying your kind impulse and sending me such a message of good will and good cheer. My constituency is for the most part dumb and invisible to me, and to hear a voice like yours speaking words of encouragement is a most pleasant experience. It is so especially at a time like this, when there is so much darkness, anxiety and doubt that we have to wage our war against.

*From the Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd George.*

[To Nicoll's elder daughter, Mrs. Elystan Miles, whose husband, an artillery officer, had been in action with his battery at Ypres for many months without intermission.]

Ministry of Munitions, *Jan.* 12, 1916.

I cannot tell you how grateful I feel to your father for the way he has sustained and supported me through all these trying months. He can hardly imagine how much he has contributed to my work through his support and inspiration. . . . Please tell your gallant husband that I am piling up for the gunners mountains of shell, high as Ben Nevis, hot as Vesuvius !

Early in February 1916 Nicoll caused some sensation by a leader in the *British Weekly* entitled ' Work for Lord Northcliffe,' which urged that he should be appointed Air Minister to deal with the German air-raids. Later in the same month Nicoll published a leader by Mr. James Douglas on ' Lord Fisher,' the burden of which was ' Bring him back.'

It was in February that the Germans began their

long series of assaults on Verdun. The Irish insurrection broke out at Easter.

The following letter refers to the failure of the Cabinet to come to a decision on the question of Conscription.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

HAMPSTEAD, [*Saturday*], *April* 13, 1916
[marked 'confidential'].

At his request I saw Lloyd George yesterday. He had asked his friend C. P. Scott, of the *Manchester Guardian*, to join us at Riddell's, and to advise him as to whether he should resign from the Cabinet. He is most anxious to resign and to take his place at the head of the Opposition. He is evidently sick and tired of being muzzled, and he does not think that in the Cabinet he can do anything to accelerate operations.

We had a great deal of talk. . . . Scott was of opinion that L. G. would be more useful outside the Cabinet as a driving force than he is within it. I was very strong, however, on the point that he should have a popular and intelligible reason for resigning before he did resign. His resignation, as he well knows, would cause great consternation among the Allies and be a mighty help to Germany, so upon the whole the effect of our talk was, I think, to make him reconsider his position. Anything may happen at the Monday Cabinet, but I think the chances are that he will remain where he is [*i.e.* as Minister of Munitions] though certainly not permanently.[1]

At the beginning of May, Nicoll motored with Sir George Riddell to Conway, to hear Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Hughes, the Premier of Australia, who made speeches on the War from the same platform. 'Claudius Clear' described this experience in the

[1] For a commentary on this letter, see Dr. Addison's 'Politics from Within,' vol. i., pp. 245-52.

*British Weekly* of May 11. During the same month Parliament enacted Conscription.

On May 31, the Battle of Jutland was fought. On June 1, Nicoll wrote a leader entitled 'Help for the Y.M.C.A.,' which resulted in nearly £5000 being subscribed by readers of the *British Weekly* for Y.M.C.A. huts in France. During the next week news came that Lord Kitchener had been lost at sea on board the *Hampshire*.

On June 15, 1916, Nicoll was asked to meet Mr. Lloyd George and Dr. Addison at Sir George Riddell's house to discuss whether Mr. Lloyd George should leave the Ministry of Munitions and accept the position of Secretary for War, which had been formally offered to him by the Prime Minister. Mr. Lloyd George was in doubt. His inclination was to resign from the Government altogether. He thought the War was being sadly muddled. There was no cohesion or co-operation between the Allies. They had no definite plans and no proper military conferences. He had intended to resign, but owing to Kitchener's death another alternative had presented itself, viz. the War Office. But here he was faced with the difficulty that certain powers had been conferred upon General Robertson, which might make it difficult for Mr. Lloyd George, as Minister of War, to exercise his proper functions.

Nicoll said he thought Mr. Lloyd George's duty quite clear. He must accept office and not haggle about powers. If he refused, he would occasion consternation and dismay. His resignation would be a public disaster. Dr. Addison agreed, but thought Mr. Lloyd George must stipulate for full powers, otherwise he would be hampered by the soldiers.

Sir George Riddell thought Mr. Lloyd George should accept, but it was most important that he should stipulate for the powers which had always been attached to the office, otherwise there was certain to be trouble. The difficulty was the repeal of the Order in Council, under which Kitchener had parted with a considerable part of his powers as

Secretary of State to the General Staff, whose chief was General Robertson. When powers had been publicly conferred upon a man, he resented having them rescinded, and that would be General Robertson's position. However, the Prime Minister would rather risk a row with General Robertson than see Mr. Lloyd George resign and go into Opposition.

Mr. Lloyd George agreed, but said that in practice he believed there would be no difficulty, as they would work well together and, he thought, would make a strong combination. Robertson could work out a plan for joint action between the Allies, while he, Mr. Lloyd George, could press for a conference and place Robertson's case before it.

After the discussion, Mr. Lloyd George concluded that it would be his duty to take the post, subject to having reasonable powers.[1]

On July 1 began the Battle of the Somme, which lasted for many weeks and involved appalling British losses. On September 14, Nicoll wrote a moving leader headed 'The Casualty Lists.'

*To a Correspondent.*

*Sept.* 14, 1916.

As to the War, if you wait a little you will see, I think, that I spoke with the greatest moderation. The public do not yet know what they owe to Mr. Lloyd George, and if Lord Northcliffe had been appointed to the Air Ministry we should have had no fear of Zeppelins. However, I am quite content to be judged by time. I have been in constant contact with the actual facts. The truth is, we very nearly on several occasions lost the War.

In October Nicoll published a small volume, 'Prayer in War Time,' containing sixteen articles selected from those which he had written for the *British Weekly* since the War began.

[1] This summary, which has been compiled from quite independent sources, agrees substantially with the longer account printed by Dr. Addison in his 'Politics from Within,' vol. i. pp. 261-3.

The first number of the *British Weekly* had been published on November 5, 1886. The number for November 2, 1916, opened with a retrospect by the editor, entitled 'Thirty Years of the British Weekly.' Nicoll expressed profound gratitude for his own survival. 'Every editorial chair in London—of daily papers, of weekly papers, of monthly magazines—has been emptied and filled again. We alone [1] remain at the same job.' He acknowledged the unfailing prosperity of his journal, so that now it went over the whole world and had friends everywhere. 'We are stating the truth in a very restrained way when we say that the *British Weekly* is the most widely circulated journal of its kind in existence.' In an impressive personal paragraph the editor, while not denying errors and failures, wrote :

'We claim to have a clear conscience on one point. We have never written anything we did not thoroughly believe. We have never taken up a cause because it was popular, and we have never forsaken a cause because it was unpopular. Again and again we have taken a line which has not commended itself to a large portion of our constituency. But our friends have shown magnificent tolerance and sympathy, and we believe that from the lowest point of view it is wise to cultivate the accent of conviction. At all events for us there was no other policy. We would have a thousand times rather abandoned the work than written against our faith. All those thirty years, from the beginning until now, we have had a perfectly free hand. No one has exercised the slightest control over the *British Weekly*, or even made any suggestion as to its methods and policy. We have been, in the full sense of the word, free, and have habitually used our freedom.'

Towards the end of November, after the defeat of Rumania, Nicoll received a letter from a Scottish professor, who wrote in panic to suggest that we must

[1] Nicoll learned afterwards that the editor of the *British Architect*, who had been appointed as far back as 1878, did not retire until the end of 1916.

make peace on what terms we could get. Nicoll flamed out: 'I would rather be stripped of all I possess than make an ignominious peace. Yes, and die fighting.'

As the year drew to its close the military outlook grew more gloomy and threatening. Early in December Mr. Asquith resigned, and the Coalition Ministry was reconstructed. Nicoll wrote a well-informed leader headed 'The Crisis,' which was published on December 7. The next day Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister of a national Government, formed with the sole object of winning the War, and composed of men holding the same ideas as to its prosecution. A small War Cabinet was set up for carrying on the terrible conflict.

Early in 1917 Nicoll resumed the campaign to which he attached high importance—against State Purchase, but in favour of war-time prohibition of intoxicants. Dr. Denney contributed two able articles to the *British Weekly* on 'State Purchase' (January 18) and 'Prohibition' (February 15).

*To Principal Denney.*

*Jan.* 19, 1917.

I have been very much under the weather this winter owing to a bad cold settled on my lung. I was for about three months practically confined to my bedroom, but I am getting about a little again. I thought it was the last phase. I managed, however, to do a good deal of dictation in my room, but I have not been out of London since I returned from Lumsden at the beginning of September. We are starting to-day to Bournemouth for a fortnight.

*To Sir George Riddell.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Feb.* 9, 1917.

We had the greatest ill-luck at Bournemouth. The temperature was lower for most of the time than in any other part of the British Isles, and the east wind was as fierce and bitter as I have ever known

it, even in Edinburgh. But I got through the time, coughing and reading Dumas. I read the three volumes of 'The Three Musketeers,' the three volumes of 'Twenty Years After,' and the four volumes of the 'Vicomte de Bragelonne'—every word; and if there be better reading in the world I don't know it.

Meanwhile, great events were taking place. In December President Wilson had sent a 'Peace Note' to all the combatant powers, and in January he told the American Senate that 'it must be a peace without victory.' On February 1, the Germans recommenced their 'unrestricted' submarine warfare, and that same month President Wilson broke off diplomatic relations with Berlin. The Russian Revolution began in March, and in April the United States entered the War.

*To Dr. Archibald Fleming.*

*March* 9, 1917.

You have no business to be writing sermons after midnight on Saturday. I sometimes think this War will finish all my friends. Principal Denney is very seriously ill. They are very quiet about it, but I am afraid it was something in the nature of a stroke.

*To Professor H. R. Mackintosh.*

*March* 10, 1917.

So many of my best friends have committed suicide—John Watson, Elmslie, Hugh Price Hughes, Silvester Horne, and others. We cannot afford to lose Denney. These next ten years should be his best. But I knew he was doing far too much in connexion with the Central Fund [of the United Free Church].

*To Dr. James Moffatt.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *March* 31, 1917.

I have had the worst winter I have lived through since I left Kelso for Dawlish in the end of 1885. I

got a very bad cold in my lung, and it has been extraordinarily persistent. For some months I had to confine myself to my bedroom, doing my dictation as best I could but feeling very feeble. Then I went to Bournemouth, hoping that this would drive the cough away. But unfortunately it was colder than any other place in the kingdom, and I found it impossible to get comfortably warm. Since we returned I have been going to town twice a week, as I did not wish to pose as an invalid and I wanted to see people and not fall out of touch. It is, however, a considerable effort for me to do this, and I am still bothered with the cough, especially at night and morning. . . . At 65 a man does not recuperate as he did at 34.

Our prospects as regards the *British Weekly* are rather obscure. So far, we have kept up our circulation wonderfully, but the danger is that the supply of paper may be completely stopped. However, I do not vex myself overmuch about this, as in normal circumstances I should have been out of it. At least I always intended to get out of it, as I have no faith whatever in old men, and I had also some jobs pretty near to completion which I should have liked to leave behind me finished.

I do not very well know what to say about the War. There is not the slightest doubt that L. G. has put a great deal more energy into everything, and that we are in a much better condition than we were a year ago. It still remains to be seen whether Russia will go forward adequately, but there is a disposition to be hopeful. The anxiety that the Russian experts here seem to have is that there may be a reaction in favour not so much of the Tsar as of *a* Tsar of one kind or another. Sir Joseph Maclay says that, when he found what the Balfour-Jackson regime had done [at the Admiralty], he sat down and wept. They seem to have done nothing, or to have done everything badly. Whether it will be possible to come up with them remains to be seen, but no improvement can yet be traced, nor is it

reasonable to expect much improvement for some months to come. If you will look at the *B.W.* you will see a thing about Lord Fisher from 'a well-known correspondent.' This was written and sent to me by Lord Fisher himself.

As to the Liquor Traffic, there is no doubt that the Prime Minister is with the State Purchase people. But I still think that when the demands of the Trade become articulate they will be rejected. It was proposed to buy up the distilling and brewing businesses in Ireland, which are on a great scale, and add them to the money to be furnished to the Home Rule Government. They would be able in this manner to increase greatly the profits and to finance themselves prosperously even without Ulster. But I hear on the best authority that the negotiations have come to a stand, owing to the immense demands of the Trade. I believe that when the English and Scottish voters realize that they are to spend £150,000,000 in purchasing the existing stock of whisky, besides all other charges, they will shrink back. But there is no question that the Trade have complete power over the present Government. In fact, the Administration reeks of alcohol. I do not know more than one or two stalwarts in the whole number. It ought in fairness to L. G. to be remembered that he has always been in favour of some kind of liquor scheme, but, as he sketched it, it was a very different thing from the scheme before the Cabinet to-day. It is rather a sign of the times that men like —— and E. V. Lucas, both tremendous Asquithists, are quite confident that Asquith will be back at the head of affairs in three months. I do not think so.

*To Dr. Robert Donald.*

[Then editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, whose elder daughter had just died, after more than ten years of lingering illness. About this date the daily roll of War fatalities was very heavy.]

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *April* 3, 1917.

My dear Robert,—My heart has been much with you and yours since I heard the news—I will not call it the sad news, though you will all be very sad and must be for a time. But she has been delivered from the fight which she waged so long and with such sunny sincerity and courage. And I am a true believer in the happy reunion of loving souls in a brighter world than this. She has left you many sweet memories—many good hopes. Please give my homage and sincerest sympathy to your dear wife. You can drown your grief in work as she cannot. And I am very, very sorry for your surviving daughter.

I have been down again with cold. I can't fight weather like this ; the nights are terrible.

With much love,

Yours very affectionately,

W. R. Nicoll.

In April Nicoll began a series of articles in the *British Weekly* entitled 'Reunion in Eternity.' In a world so full of bereavement, this theme appealed to multitudes of stricken hearts. The articles were collected, revised, and published with additions as a volume in November 1918.

The War casualties among non-combatants included Professor James Hope Moulton, of Manchester, who died of exposure in an open boat in which he, with Dr. Rendel Harris, had escaped when their steamer was torpedoed by an enemy submarine in the Gulf of Lyons.

*To the Rev. W. Fiddian Moulton.*

*April* 14, 1917.

Your brother's death was a great blow. He was so radiant, so benignant, so full of life and love, that his passing leaves us very much the poorer. He made for himself a unique place, and we cannot hope to fill it.

On April 17 Nicoll lunched by appointment with the Prime Minister at Downing Street, in order to discuss the question of State Control of intoxicants. A note made that afternoon by Lady Nicoll supplies the following record :

' W. R. N. returned very silent and tired and serious. I asked no questions till he had drunk his tea—then he told me very quietly what he could. Lord Milner and Lord St. Davids were there. They discussed other things till half-way through lunch, then they got on to the subject of State Control. They were all very calm. The Premier said that W. R. N. was one of his greatest friends, and that he had pledged himself to nothing as yet. He thought that State Control would be a better management than the present control. . . . Finally, he said he would decide nothing without first consulting W. R. N. again.'

*To Sir Henry Lucy.*

*May* [9], 1917.

Thank you very much for your kind letter. It emboldens me to put a question, which I have always tried to put to you and Lord Rosebery and have always faltered in uttering. My question is—Did Gladstone break chairs at Dalmeny? The accusation has now appeared in books as well as in papers, and it is explicitly believed by many people. Now, *you know*. But whether you will choose to say Yes or No, I cannot tell. However, I have mustered up courage at last.

*To Mr. D. C. Lathbury.*

*May* 1917.

I do not expect anything from the Irish Conference, but it may put us on a better footing with the Allied nations. I have long thought that Ireland was appointed to be a thorn in our flesh, resembling St. Paul's thorn in its perpetuity. I see a great many Irishmen and I never see two of the same opinion, even though they may belong to the same party.

To another correspondent in the same month Nicoll wrote : ' It is very kind of you to ask me to give you a forecast, but I have not the faintest idea of what the world will be like in 1930. I know I shall then be out of it, and long before, and I am not very sorry.'

Early in June Nicoll suffered a heavy bereavement by the death of his firm friend and ally, Dr. James Denney, Principal of the United Free Church College, Glasgow. In a memorial leader [1] he wrote : ' He gave us in the *British Weekly* such help as no other man could, and over a period of many years we never remember him refusing any request. . . . The news of his death was a blow on the heart.'

*To Dr. James Moffatt.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *June* 16, 1917.

Dr. Denney and I were friends for many years, and the intimacy of our friendship dated from the time Mrs. Denney died, when we had much correspondence of a very sacred kind. Yes, there can be no doubt of it—he was our first man [in Scotland], and the public are more and more coming to realize it. Ten years more of him would have been a tremendous help. We will not make up for his loss. Nobody made up for Elmslie, nobody made up for Price Hughes.

And now, my dear friend, I want to say a very serious word to you. . . . From what I hear, you are in danger of the same fate as Denney. Of course I do not mean to say in immediate danger, but in real danger. I think I have ventured to say to you before that you are taking too much upon you. Your tremendous literary work, your professorial work, your preaching regularly to a large congregation, are more than any man can do. We simply cannot afford to lose you. We shall look to you more and more.

[1] See the *British Weekly* of June 14, 1917.

*To Dr. James Moffatt.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *June* 23, 1917.

The end of the War looks as far off as ever. The able American officers who have come over to France and to London and have examined the situation give it at least two and a half years. They calculate on having ultimately one million men in France, and say it cannot be done with fewer. Italy very nearly slipped out, but L. G. was able to coax them back. In the meantime all people, even the omniscient, are puzzled about Russia. Of course, the unknown factor is the economic position of Germany. We seem to have made very little progress against the submarines, and the danger which we in the West, and the Americans also, most dread is the development of the submarines, which will prevent or delay the transmission of American soldiers and American munitions. However, you hear plenty of this kind of talk. But I believe you may take what I say as true. At least, it is first-hand. There is no doubt that in many respects, and especially in Conferences, L. G. has played a most useful part.

*To Miss Grace King* [of New Orleans].

*June* 24, 1917.

We are more than grateful to America for her vital aid at this crisis, when for the time being we are forsaken by Russia. There seems no anticipation in well-informed quarters of an early end of the War. Two years is the time given. In spite of all its horrors I am hopeful that this War will in the end draw America and England together. My own hope would be to see one great Republic embracing all the English-speaking States.

Well, we have just to go through with it day by day. My only son has been out and my only son-in-law also, but they are mercifully spared as yet.

But who will be living when the War ends at last? No one can tell.

*To Miss Jane T. Stoddart.*

*July* 1917.

I highly approve of the notes you have sent. We must certainly avoid the word *reprisals*, which is most misleading. Our only chance is that Lloyd George should take up aeroplanes as he did explosives. I infer from reports of the Secret Session [in the House of Commons] that he had a ghastly story to tell of deficiency everywhere. Can we be saved from our stupidity? I sometimes doubt it.

*To Dr. Baines Griffith.*

[*End of July*] 1917.

The only compensation to my mind in the War is the accession of America. I have longed for many years to see the great free peoples made one. I shall not see it, but I believe that the ties may become much closer still, and that we may be united in government as well as in action. When I think of all I owe to America and American friends and American books, my heart warms to the great nation.

*To Mr. John Grigor.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square,
*Aug.* 3, 1917.

This War has kept me at my task much longer than I had meant to stay, but there is nothing for it except to make the best of it. I have had a long time now.

In the *British Weekly* of August 9, Nicoll wrote a leader entitled 'Three Years—and After,' in which he declared, 'We have a deep and humble, but well-grounded assurance that God has been with us in this War.' That same day Nicoll went north to Lumsden for five weeks' holiday among his native hills.

*To Mr. Clement K. Shorter.*

THE OLD MANSE, LUMSDEN, ABERDEENSHIRE,
*Sept.* 7, 1917.

When I came to Lumsden I was in very poor health, and the weather was by no means in my favour. It rained almost incessantly, and even when it was not raining the air was exceedingly damp, which does not suit my complaint. However, we had plenty of petrol here, and whenever there was a cessation we went out for short drives. Our longest was to Braemar, which is, I suppose, about fifty miles from here. A nephew of mine [Innes Logan] is minister of the U.F. Church there. I met some interesting people, including Sir Donald Macalister, Principal of the University of Glasgow, and have not been badly off for talk. But my lung has not improved until recently. All my associates in London and here brought pressure upon me to stay another week. It is the first time I have ever taken five weeks' holiday since I went to America. But I should like my lung cleared for whatever may be before us in the winter time.

You cannot deny that I have been catholic in my reading of old books, for I have carefully perused Fielding's 'Tom Jones' and Baxter's 'Saint's Everlasting Rest.' 'Tom Jones' is extraordinarily good. I always admired it, and I do so now more than ever. It is in essence a plea for animalism combined with a good heart, but there are many fine and deep things scattered through it, especially in those essays which I used to think an interruption.

What you say about Birrell is very interesting. It seems fundamentally wrong that a man who has still so much vigour and brilliancy should now be in the position of a mere spectator. I am afraid I am rather inclined to agree with him about Swinburne, who will be buried under a mountain of books. But Heinemann will produce a better set of [Swinburne's] books than Allen did with Ruskin. I look

upon the Ruskin books as about the ugliest and clumsiest I have in my collection.

The *Daily Telegraph* of November 29, 1917, published a letter from Lord Lansdowne, declaring that the War had lasted too long and suggesting that the British should re-state their war-aims. It was severely condemned by almost the whole British Press and by practically every representative British statesman, but it produced a lamentable impression in the United States. In 1921 Nicoll remarked : ' Asquith deserves a great deal of credit he never got in the War. He was not a Lansdownite.'

In October Nicoll issued ' A Library for Five Pounds ' —a booklet comprising letters by ' Claudius Clear ' on how to select a cheap collection of the best books.

*To the Rev. C. E. Green.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Feb.* 7, 1918.

In the air raid of Monday night last week I went down as usual from my study to the dining-room, taking Dorling's ' Life of Dora Greenwell ' with me. I read it with great peace during the raid,[1] and found when I closed it that I had the points for a leading article, which I was able to dictate without effort. But my debt to Dora can never be paid. I think I have learned more theology from her than from any other teacher, and my interest in her is very great. We had some correspondence before she died, but we never met.

In another letter to the same correspondent, Nicoll added :

I was specially pleased with what you say about Dora Greenwell. When she died, her literary executrix, the wife of Canon Waite of Durham, allowed me to go over her manuscripts, but she had destroyed nearly everything of value. I made a

[1] It was characteristic of Nicoll's physical courage that air raids worried him only in so far as they interfered with his work.

little article at the time, which appeared in *Good Words* shortly after her death. I have been for years intimately familiar with her books; in fact, much of them I can repeat by heart.

*To Mr. E. V. Lucas.*

*Feb.* 16, 1918.

I wrote to Barrie about my Brontë copy of 'Vanity Fair,' explaining that through my stupidity I had not sent it before I came down to Brighton. However, I said that I would send it by hand to your office on Monday. Shorter bought it from Charlotte Brontë's husband; and I bought it from him for £100. Miss Brontë's name does not occur in the inscription. It is a copy of the second edition of 'Vanity Fair.' If it is too late for this year's sale, I would give it for another year.

This was the copy of 'Vanity Fair' which Thackeray himself presented to Charlotte Brontë. Nicoll sent it to be sold in the Red Cross Sale at Christie's, in organizing which Sir J. M. Barrie was chairman and Mr. E. V. Lucas secretary of the Books and Manuscripts Committee. To acknowledge Nicoll's gift, Sir J. M. Barrie had written on February 12:

'Charlotte Brontë's "Vanity Fair" will certainly be one of our choicest items [1] in the Christie's sale, and in the name of the Committee, including myself, I thank you warmly. It is really very good of you to offer yourself up in this way, and one may say "If thus all!" But we seem to be doing well, especially in MSS. I sometimes feel it would be more entertaining to invent the things than to appeal for them (Lot 100—four letters from Shakespeare to Lady Bacon, showing that she wrote the plays, etc.).'

*To Canon A. C. Deane.*

[Vicar of Hampstead from 1913 until 1916, and then vicar of All Saints, Ennismore Gardens, S.W.]

[1] The book realized £325, 10s.

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Feb.* 23, 1918.

I wish I could see you again. I have missed your company exceedingly. It has been like the closing of a window in my soul. The times are not very bright, but there is nothing that brightens like sensible unargumentative talk. I have moved down to the Reform Club since the year began and have had a dreadful time. Many of the important politicians are there, and are very communicative. They belong exclusively, so far as I can find, either to the Asquithians or the Pacifists. What unites them is a common hatred of Lloyd George, which is simply maniacal and for which it is not easy to account, especially when taken with the fact that his friends are very few and some of them very lukewarm.

No one had a keener sense than Nicoll of what Mr. Rudyard Kipling describes as 'the damnable streak in each of us which leads us to stop our own work and talk about the duties of others.' He told a correspondent in the spring of 1918: 'It seems to me that we have ruinously overdone committees, conferences, congresses and the like. The supreme duty of every man is to attend to his own little corner and cultivate that intensively. The futility of associations and debating societies is to my mind indescribable. This kind of thing ruined Russia, and it will ruin us if we are not careful.' He deplored and denounced 'the savage lust for talk which has taken possession of the Nonconformist Churches,' the 'crime of loquacity' fostered by endless religious conferences and commissions, and the amount of time and energy which ministers squander at such gatherings to the neglect of steady spade-work in their proper field and among their own people.

Nicoll wrote a grave leader in the *British Weekly* of February 21 on 'The Three Duties of the Day'—which he defined as (1) Unity, (2) Endurance, and (3) Moral Indignation.

In March the great German offensive began in France, and brought on a grave military crisis. The weeks which followed were tense with anxiety. In the *British Weekly* of March 28, Nicoll wrote : ' The boldest holds his breath. We realize perhaps for the first time that the issue may be defeat.' General Foch was appointed on April 14 to the supreme command of the Allied armies in France. Sir Douglas Haig told his soldiers : ' With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each of us must fight to the end.'

A second German offensive opened in May. The Austrians in Italy suffered a great defeat in June. General Foch began in July his counter-attack which led on to final victory.

While these tremendous issues were being decided, personal letters appear trivial in comparison. We quote a few which throw light on Nicoll's mind.

*To Mr. Guthrie.*

*March* 26, 1918.

The Prime Minister sent for me three weeks ago and told me that State Purchase was dead. I asked whether this applied to the present session or to future sessions. He answered, ' To all sessions, as far as I am concerned.' He also informed me of the resolution of the Government to discontinue the extra grant for brewing. This had been come to partly owing to American pressure, and I believe American pressure has been equally brought to bear on State Purchase.

*To Mr. D. C. Lathbury.*

*April* 1918.

I am getting rather alarmed about L. G. Everybody is bashing his head, regardless of the fact that they have no substitute for him. I think I told you that, at the request of the Committee, I have moved down to the Reform Club. I go there every Friday. The air is filled with hatred.

*To a minister at Nottingham.*

*May* 1918.

I am not in a position to undertake preaching engagements at present. I find that my physical strength is barely equal to the demands which are made upon me. These have increased in War time in various ways, owing to the reduction of our staff. My strength, alas, does not increase, but the reverse. I am not very far off now from sixty-seven, and I have never been a strong man. In ordinary circumstances I should have retired years ago, and I always laid my plans with that end in view. However, none of us can resign now so long as we can crawl. Believe me, there is no man for whom I would have stretched a point sooner than for you, but I know I am working up to the limit of my strength, and I should like to hold on till better days are in sight.

In May Nicoll learned that he had been unanimously elected President of the Brontë Society for the next three years.

*To Mr. Wigley.*

*June* 8, 1918.

I feel that there is a bond of brotherhood between us in the matter of the Brontës. I began to read them when I was little more than a child, and the interest has never died away. I mean to make a fresh study of the books, in view of the fact that I have recently been made President of the Brontë Society in succession to Mrs. Humphry Ward. This will entail an address, and I want to do it freshly. So that I have been extremely interested in what you say about the things that strike you. I trust that you will be able to visit the Brontë country in quieter times. I shall never forget my visit there.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

[Who had just suffered a great bereavement.]

ROYAL YORK HOTEL, BRIGHTON, *July* 1918.

I have spent much time reading George Eliot after a long interval. She seems rather to possess a very high form of talent than genius, but she has fine things. I copy two out for you :

'Deep unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. . . . Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity.'

'He conceived no picture of the future but one made up of hard working days, such as he lived through with growing contentment and intensity of interest every fresh week : love he thought could never be anything to him but a living memory—a limb lopped off but not gone from consciousness. He did not know that the power of loving was all the while gaining new force within him.'

God bless you !

Ever yours affectionately,

W. R. NICOLL.

*To Mr. Clement Shorter.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *July* 23 [1918].

Many thanks for the beautiful book. It brought many things to my mind, and I hope to write something about it.

I have been hearing a little about you. I am very glad you can get those week ends. But, my dear friend, only Time will turn the wound into a scar.

I have had a very thin time—not feeling well and with a good many cares and troubles. . . . But I hope to get to Scotland, and I may write you from there if I find out anything. Meanwhile, 'Courage, my child.'

Yours ever affectionately,

W. R. NICOLL.

I am getting too old for my job, and I can't stand the new poetry !

In August Nicoll as usual retreated into Aberdeenshire, and enjoyed what he described as 'a glorious holiday among my own hills.' About Michaelmas he wrote to Dr. Moffatt : 'When I went up to Lumsden I was in very poor health. My son said it was Spanish influenza. Whether that be so or not, I was extremely seedy. I took a perfectly quiet week at Lumsden and bucked up amazingly. After that we had a really pleasant time. Not such long drives as usual, but agreeable visitors and little trips here and there. I was altogether about five weeks away, which I think is the longest time I have ever had, and returned to London greatly invigorated, as may be seen from the fact that I did five leaders in succession, as well as a lot of other stuff.'

*To the Right Hon. W. M. Hughes.*
[Prime Minister of Australia.]

*Sept.* 16, 1918.

Will you permit me to say that I have been reading with the deepest interest your brilliant and burning addresses. You came very near to me when you were in Aberdeen. I do not see how any one can fail to sympathize with your War aim, but I want to write from a literary critic's point of view. I want to find out where you got your style, how you can command words as you do. You puzzle me the same way that Lloyd George does. You hit on the finest and choicest expressions every here and there, and you never seem to know that you have done so. I have often tackled Lloyd George on this subject, and I find that he does not know what is good and what is bad in his literary expression.

*To Canon A. C. Deane.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Oct.* 19, 1918.

We had W. M. Hughes [Prime Minister of Australia] and his wife to dinner on Thursday night.

> They are the greatest book-lovers I have met for a long time, and have an astonishing knowledge. Nothing said about tariffs—two sentences about the War—and then books, books, books.

In the autumn of this year Nicoll published a small volume entitled 'Reunion in Eternity,' which met with an immediate and lasting welcome. For, as his preface puts it, 'the theme has never drawn so many solicitous hearts as it draws to-day. There are many who think of little else. They count the hours and the days, the down-sittings and the uprisings, that are between them and the great restoration.' The first part of this book for the bereaved consisted of twelve 'Essays on Reunion,' which had already appeared in the *British Weekly*. Two of these—'Dante on Reunion,' and 'The Teaching of Luther and Melanchthon'—were from the pen of Miss Jane T. Stoddart. Next came a catena of 'Testimonies on Reunion,' drawn from many varied sources. The appendix contained letters from Professor A. S. Peake, Dr. T. E. Page, Canon William Barry, and Mr. Arthur E. Waite, who summarized respectively the doctrines on this subject found in the Old Testament and the Greek and Latin classics, and taught by the Church of Rome and the mystics. The following letter to Canon Barry (dated February 1918) embodies Nicoll's ultimate belief:

> What I gathered from Dante and others was mainly the doctrine of Browning, that our personalities are distinct in the next world, and that a pure and holy love between individuals in this life is the creation of God and will live on through the next. Browning's deep teaching of the eternity of love seems the most reasonable and the most consoling of creeds, and, so far as I can make out, it is entirely in sympathy with the Catholic doctrine. But of course the widening of the sphere makes room for new loves, and there are so many lives almost loveless, or quite loveless, in this world, that they must find in God not only His love but the love of fellow-

beings like themselves—the redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

The profound thankfulness and unspeakable relief felt by all men when victory at last came in sight are vividly reflected in the following letter. It describes Nicoll's experiences as a guest at Danny Park, near Hassocks, a house then occupied by Sir George Riddell.

*To Dr. James Moffatt.*

ROYAL YORK HOTEL, BRIGHTON, *Oct.* 29, 1918.

The Prime Minister has been spending as much time as possible in a country house at Hassocks, near Brighton, and I spent a day with him there last month.

It was the day [September 30] when he received, at 10 A.M., the formal submission of Bulgaria. The news had a transfiguring effect upon him, for he knew its significance. He was like a boy. He had rolled off at least ten years, and even his hair seemed darker. His face was a healthy pink. He had thoroughly thrown off his illness, though it had left a certain amount of weakness. It was the ordinary influenza, but a fairly serious attack. . . . He began at once talking about Bulgaria, and as often as his attention was directed to other subjects so often he returned to Bulgaria. He anticipated the collapse of Austria and Turkey, and he surmised that the Germans would try to establish a shorter and more formidable line. In the afternoon he and I were having tea in the drawing-room and conversing, when the door burst open. There entered Lord Reading and Mr. Baker, the U.S. Secretary for War, a little smart man who looked as if he had come directly out of a bandbox. When the Premier and Lord Reading saw each other they broke out into fervid demonstrations of delight, while Baker and I looked benevolently on. It was a sight well worth

seeing, the Prime Minister and the Lord Chief Justice behaving in that way. A burden seemed to be removed from their shoulders.

I like Reading very much, and we had a frank talk. The story of the additional American troops was told.

One day last spring L. G. got a very gloomy telegram [at Downing Street] about the situation in France. He did not know what to do, but he says that when he is perplexed the best thing for him is to go out and walk and think out things. So he went into the Park, and decided to send an urgent telegram to Wilson. The terms of the telegram [despatched on March 27] were that there was imperative need for strong American reinforcements to be sent immediately. Wilson's reply was : 'I will do my damnedest. 130,000 a month, and as many more as you can ship.' The next thing was to get Sir Joseph Maclay.[1] Of him L. G. has the highest opinion. He asked Sir Joseph how many troops he could ship. Maclay asked him to give him twenty-four hours. At the end of the twenty-four hours he reported that we might get 300,000 American soldiers over each month.[2] L. G. thinks that Maclay for this deserves to be called one of the saviours of his country. We are all, I think, much impressed by the fact that L. G. had apparently been the only man to act in the emergency and that he had consulted nobody.

L. G. said that he had been thinking all day about the time [in the spring of 1916] when Kitchener wanted to abandon Salonika and threatened, as his pleasant way was, to resign if this were not done. Every one in the Cabinet, with the exception of L. G., was in favour of this. L. G. manœuvred for position, and got M. Albert Thomas, the French Socialist, of whom he is much enamoured, to come over. A luncheon was given at Downing Street,

[1] The Rt. Hon. Lord Maclay, Shipping Controller, 1916-1921, member of the War Cabinet, 1918.

[2] By July 2, 1,000,000 American soldiers had been shipped.

then of course in possession of Asquith. Thomas showed such social gifts that he had everybody in good humour before the subject was discussed. Then he gave such a clear, cogent argument in favour of keeping Salonika that it was agreed to. I said, 'You had as much credit as Thomas,' but L. G. would not agree to this, and he said that without Salonika Bulgaria would never have surrendered and we never would have got Syria.

The Prime Minister spoke with considerable reserve of Haig and Robertson and of our Generals as a whole. He indicated that his difficulties in getting Foch as head of the armies were very great. Both Haig and Robertson held firmly to the opinion that the Americans could give us no tangible help for a year. Haig thought that there would be no big German offensive, but a lot of small offensives with which our troops would be quite competent to deal. L. G. said the situation altered as if by magic when Foch put his hand to the plough.

Wilson's first Note to Germany was rather resented by the War Cabinet and by the French. Apart from other objections, it was thought that Wilson ought to have consulted the Allies before sending his questions. However, they immediately opened negotiations with him, and the later Notes were composite and therefore satisfactory. They have had some little anxiety about the Freedom of the Seas provision, but I fancy it will whittle down to excluding the use of U-boats.

L. G. talked to me about his reception at the General Assemblies.[1] He said that he had no nervousness in going to the Established Church Assembly ; he knew they were Tories and staunch supporters of the War. He was much more nervous of going to the U.F. Assembly, as he understood that a great many of them were Asquithites. However, he was very cordially received there. He said that this was the largest of his audiences, and they

[1] Of the three Scottish Churches, held in Edinburgh the previous May, each of which was addressed by the Prime Minister.

had an indefinable air of implying, 'We are the people of Scotland. If you please us, you have done all that is necessary.' He was glad to get out and go to the Wee Frees, and he had not been there five minutes before he felt that he was at home. He said it was a shabby meeting-place and only one-third full, and most of the people looked as if they did not know where they would go when the proceedings were over. However, his heart went out to them. He felt: 'This is where I belong, to the struggling and the poor.' Many of the faces, he said, had great dignity, and the Moderator made the best speech of the three Moderators, sometimes hesitating for a word but always getting the right word in the end. He said: 'I tell you, Nicoll, these people are conserving something that ought to be conserved, whatever it be.' Considering them and their poverty—which he exaggerated—and the magnificent contribution they had made to the Army, his whole heart went out to them, and he made there by far the best of his Edinburgh speeches. He showed great interest in the Wee Frees, and asked me a number of questions about them which I was not able to answer properly.

During his convalescence L. G. was reading Mommsen, and pointed out that there are many passages which he conceives to be parallel to our War experience.

There was no doubt—a few days ago at any rate—that peace was coming, and coming honourably, and coming soon.

L. G. favours America taking over Palestine, but considers it open to debate. He would like the Americans to have a hand deep in the East.

Nicoll wrote to Mrs. Marie Connor Leighton, the novelist, who was then living at Hassocks: 'On Bulgaria Day I was with the Prime Minister near Hassocks. I thought of you. It was a wonderful day, when the key-stone of the arch was loosened.'

The news that the Armistice had been signed and

that the War was ended reached London on Monday morning, November 11.

The *British Weekly* of November 21, 1918, contained an enthusiastic leader by the editor entitled 'The Premier's War Record,' which was reprinted and sold by tens of thousands in pamphlet form. Nicoll always steadfastly maintained that no other man did so much to win the War as Mr. Lloyd George.

*To Mr. John Buchan.*

*Nov.* 29, 1918.

I should be inclined to lay great stress on the fact that the Prime Minister is one of the people who was brought up in a house with no servant in it, and he knows what the poor need as no other statesman does. This is his one claim which I think has been rather overlooked.

*To the Rev. G. A. Frank Knight.*

*Dec.* 4, 1918.

As you are aware, Lloyd George's scheme for Temperance Reform was State Purchase. This I opposed to the utmost of my ability, and at last he informed me that he would have no more to do with it. Now, he is extremely sanguine about the Tory party following him in great measures of reform, if for nothing else because the alternative is revolution. But I doubt whether they will go beyond a certain length. I see no sign of it. In that case he will have to break with them and appeal to the country on his programme. It is very hard, however, to foresee the future. I think he has sufficient reason for a General Election, and I also think that a Coalition is the only possible form of government at the present time.

*To Mr. A. Riach.*

*Dec.* 1918.

I am not at all interested in the Election as I have been in the War. Now that the War is over, every-

thing seems subordinate. I am fully convinced that L. G. is the proper leader for the nation. But if the nation thinks otherwise I am sure it will be a great relief to him, and we shall see what Mr. Asquith and Mr. Henderson will do.

*To the Rev. John Welwood.*

*Dec.* 1918.

We have passed through a very hard and terrible time of anxiety and misery and sorrow, but my thoughts are fixed upon the amazing victory granted to us. It was far beyond my hopes, and far beyond the hopes of those who knew the circumstances best. We will take it as a sign of hope.

*To the Rev. Dr. Barton.*

[A well-known Congregationalist minister in the United States.]

*Dec.* 1918.

I assure you, my dear Dr. Barton, whatever newspapers may say, we are all one in our conviction that the hope of the world lies in the firmest possible alliance and the closest possible understanding with your great country. Your preachers have been received here with delight and profit, and I am quite sure you would have a reception second to none of them.

*To the Rev. Frank Johnson.*

*Dec.* 1918.

It is my strong conviction that the good of Sunday schools mainly depends on the Christian devotion of the teachers. It is a very good thing for the child to know a real Christian. I did this from the beginning of my life, and the knowledge has been an anchor to me.

On Saturday, December 28, President Wilson received a royal welcome in the City of London, and Nicoll attended the Lord Mayor's luncheon at the Mansion House.

A General Election — sometimes known as the 'Coupon Election'—took place in the last week of 1918. The result was a House of Commons consisting of 338 Coalition Unionists, 136 Coalition Liberals, and 10 National Democrats—against 59 Labour members, 48 Independent Unionists, and 26 Independent Liberals.

## CHAPTER XXII

### AFTER THE WAR

During the early months of 1919 it seemed as though Europe as a whole was suffering from shell-shock. Even those nations that had won the War felt too dazed and exhausted to face the hard facts of peace. People went about like bankrupts who cannot summon energy to begin work again in earnest. Slowly and painfully they woke up to realize that they were living in a shattered, impoverished, disappointed world.

Soon after the year began Nicoll wrote to a friend :

> I am interested in your prognostications of the future. We shall no doubt have a testing time ; but somehow the experience of the War has given me a great assurance of the general sense, stability and loyalty of the nation.

*To Dr. James Moffatt.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Jan.* 8, 1919.

Let me cordially, most cordially, respond to you. Your friendship is a distinct and precious acquisition to me, and I do not mean to lose it if I can help it. Death has taken away so many of my friends, but I am thankful to have found others and still to be rich in friendship.

I have had rather a bad turn—perhaps of the same kind as yours, from which I am glad to think you have by now recovered. I have been kept mostly in bed for the last few weeks with a cold which has fastened on my weak lung. It is nothing serious, but there is a dull aching which is wearisome, and I cough a good deal, especially at night. I think, however, I am getting better, and I would have been

better altogether if I had not yielded to the temptation of going to President Wilson's reception in the City [on December 28]. I was glad I went, however, as I had some interesting and instructive talks. I saw Bonar Law just after he had got news of the collapse of Asquith,[1] and he was grieving bitterly over the largeness of the Coalition majority. He said, 'Our men will be fighting each other in a month.' I daresay he has had great trouble in winding up his men to accept L. G.'s plans. But we shall see. I had also a frank talk with Admiral Sims about Wilson, whom he does not like at all. He thinks, however, that Wilson is bound to take something back with him to America, and that he has been weakened very much by his defeats in both Houses of Congress. He said that if Wilson had triumphed there he would have become dictator, but as it is he thinks matters may be arranged. I find that our own men look upon Wilson as unfriendly to this country. He speaks well enough, but without brilliancy or fire. There was no great enthusiasm shown for him. The real enthusiasm in London was that shown for Haig, arising, I think, out of the idea that somehow he had been unfairly treated.

*From Sir George Riddell.*

[Who represented the British Press at the Paris Peace Conference.]

HÔTEL RITZ, PLACE VENDÔME, PARIS,
*Jan.* 25, 1919.

Since I came I have been occupied from morning till night, but now things are getting somewhat more settled. Are you coming to Paris? I think you would enjoy it. The place teems with statesmen, journalists, intriguers and wire-pullers of all nationalities. Copy hangs on every bough, and you would have the time of your life. Last Sunday I went with Lloyd George to visit some of the devastated areas,

[1] Who was rejected by the electors of East Fife.

including Rheims. At the Cathedral we were met by the Cardinal—a fine old boy.

The opening of the Conference was an impressive sight. It was interesting to see most of the dominating personalities of the world brought together in the same room. Old Clemenceau is a splendid old fellow. It was delightful to see him knocking off the agenda. He, Wilson, and Lloyd George all made speeches. L. G. did not know he would have to speak until he arrived—a quarter of an hour late, as the President opened the proceedings a quarter of an hour too early according to the programme. However, L. G. made an excellent speech.

I often think of you all, although I seem to be thousands of miles from home and entirely out of touch with my ordinary life.

Nicoll shrank from the journey to Paris ; but early in March he was able to go to Halifax, where he delivered his address [1] as President of the Brontë Society, taking for his subject ' Charlotte Brontë and Anne Mozley.' It became plain, however, to his friends that, like so many others, he had aged considerably and grown physically more feeble during the past four or five years.

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *April* 6, 1919.

The oculist said I had suffered badly from the strain of the War—it had made me an older man and weakened my eyes, but nothing was organically wrong.

*From Sir George Riddell.*

Hôtel Ritz, Place Vendôme, Paris,
*May* 26, 1919.

Things have been moving far too slowly. Now it is just a race between peace and anarchy. The truth is that when Wilson arrived he did not under-

[1] This address was published in the *British Weekly* of March 8, 1919.

stand Europe, and in particular he did not understand what we have done. We had to consent to delay, in order that he might learn. Then again, the Conference started out with a wrong ideal. They should first have settled the German terms, making up their minds to settle them quickly and not to strive for theoretical perfection. Then they should have set up the League of Nations, and left the League to settle minor territorial difficulties. I have been preaching this for some time past.

Are you likely to come to Paris? You will receive a warm welcome from many people. I am always meeting friends and admirers of yours. Yesterday Sir Joseph Cook was telling me that he had read the *British Weekly* for twenty years, and that you were 'a wonderful old bird.' I gently reproved him for saying such a thing about a sacred person. He apologized, and explained that the term was one of affection and admiration. I administered a caution, and then imparted some private information concerning the 'old bird's' library, which caused a great impression in Australian circles.

Old Clemenceau is ageing visibly, and his condition is one of the chief difficulties. Wilson looks rather drawn and anxious, as well he may. L. G. looks pretty well. Last week-end he went to Fontainebleau with the experts, and drafted what he thought should be the peace terms. These are being discussed this week.

*To Sir George Riddell.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *May* 31, 1919.

I was delighted with your letter. It has given me great and constant pleasure to hear of your wonderful success achieved in such difficult circumstances. What a time you have had at the burning centre of the world and as one from whom nothing has been hidden. I read what you publish most religiously—the lines, and in between the lines. You have not despaired.

Believe me, my dear friend, I am proud to the core that you have risen so nobly to the mission and call. It has been your supreme test, and you have come out like gold. I never doubted that you would.

*To Dr. Anderson Scott.*

*June* 1919.

You are much younger than I am. But I am 67 and you are only 60 ; and, believe me, you will find that every year makes a difference now. You are very wise, if I may venture to say so, in seeking for help. I would gladly retire from my own work, but the obstacles at the moment appear insurmountable, and so I daresay I shall go on till I drop.

The summer of that year was memorable for its unbroken sunshine. In August Nicoll went north to Lumsden, and enjoyed six weeks of perfect weather among the Aberdeenshire hills, in which his delight only deepened as he grew older. In a letter to a friend he mentions ' Strathbogie, Cabrach, Tomintoul, Corgarff—every name musical to me.'

During his stay at Lumsden Nicoll delivered a Communion address in his father's old church, taking for his subject ' New Aspects of Brotherhood.'

*To Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

LUMSDEN, *Aug.* 17, 1919.

We have done a good bit of motoring, and had some moving accidents about which I shall tell you and others of my friends until you are bored to tears. I cannot get any one here to take the slightest interest in them, which shows the natural perversity and depravity of the human heart in a very impressive light.

The advantage has been the long, beautiful evenings, the clear air—never once too hot, and the fragrance and beauty of the flowers, not to speak of the creditable appearance made by strawberries, peas, and other delectable articles. I have also got

a kitten, by name Potiphar, who promises to live up to the highest characteristics of his name and has made himself wonderfully at home in this strange world in the space of a very few weeks.

*To Mr. Clement K. Shorter.*

THE OLD MANSE, LUMSDEN [*August* 1919].

I have read a good deal here—mainly about the '45 and Scott. I re-read the whole of Lockhart in the first edition, many of the contemporary criticisms of it, and the Edinburgh Annual Register, of which there is a set in this house. What strikes me is the madness of Scott about money. I think I could prove that he was never at any time in his public life able to pay 20s. in the £. All the accounts in the various Lives and in Leslie Stephen fall far short of the truth. Think of ordering £1000 worth of wine !

We think of driving for another three days. My wife is a tremendous believer in fresh air, and does not like me to stay in bed and read. I think I have had enough fresh air to last me for the rest of my life, but there is something pleasing and exhilarating in motoring.

*To Miss Jane T. Stoddart.*

LUMSDEN, *Aug.* 17, 1919.

Miss Smith [1] arrived on Friday, and I am engaged in the disagreeable occupation of putting myself and her into harness. There is one very pleasant thing about it, and that is, I am now able to thank you more fully than otherwise I would have done for your exceeding kindness, patience, consideration, and ability in taking my place. I cannot say how thankful I am for the good friends that have gathered round me and perhaps prolonged by a term or two my tenure of work.

[1] Nicoll's secretary.

*To Sir Henry Lucy.*

THE OLD MANSE, LUMSDEN, *Aug.* 18, 1919.

We cannot have too much of your writing. I sometimes think that there is a new field for you in writing about yourself. Has it ever occurred to you that all you have written is practically about other people? Only of yourself as connected with these. But I know you to be full of the wisdom of life and able to set it forth as few can. I wish you would write, for example, an article, 'Returning from a Holiday.' If you will write the articles, I will supply the subjects.

*To Sir Henry Lucy.*

THE OLD MANSE, LUMSDEN, *Sept.* 2, 1919.

I am delighted to hear that Lady Lucy and you propose going to Portugal. I have never been there, but I have always been impressed by Southey's passionate love for Lisbon and for the country generally. It did him a great deal of harm when it turned his thoughts to histories of Brazil and other unpopular subjects, whereas he might have given us a great history of English literature. The only book I know about Lisbon is Henry Fielding's, and an extraordinarily good book it is. I know well enough that you do not take entire holidays at any time, but I suppose you are busier some days than others, though I am not sure. I know I am a great deal busier upon occasion than I am now.

With regard to your treatment of my objection, I deny, first, that your books are ponderous. Secondly, I claim that I know them quite as well as you do. And thirdly, I am prepared to maintain that they are not autobiography. There is any amount of information most interestingly conveyed about what you heard and saw, but very little information indeed as to the strong personality lurking behind. You do not tell us much of what you felt and

thought, and we shall be glad to hear from you, Sir, when you are ready.

*To a friend who had been bereaved.*

*Sept.* 25, 1919.

I understand too well what you say. It is a hard and long fight, and though the wound will be healed by time the scar remains for ever. You will find great help in work and in the society of a few chosen friends, and you will be well advised if you do not think too much about the future. As the days pass they bring their message with them and open ways for our feet. I have no belief whatever in spiritualism, but I believe very much in prayer.

*To Mr. Charles Murray.*

[Author of 'Hamewith.']

Hampstead, *Oct.* 10, 1919.

To-day I enter my sixty-ninth year, and am a person of great antiquity, especially among editors. I have seen every London editor come and go since the day I sat down to fashion the first number of the *British Weekly*.

*To Canon A. C. Deane.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Oct.* 18, 1919.

We had in Scotland the best and longest holiday I ever had. The weather was unprecedented. Hitherto we have been quite pleased with one fair day out of two, but we had six weeks of unbroken splendid weather. We motored a great deal, partly to Jacobite shrines, and had many friends seeing us, some of them very pleasant. Also—a thing, Sir, which you will despise—we had the best of everything to eat, mostly out of our own garden. I never was so reluctant to come back to work, but there was no help.

During the War Nicoll came into friendly and confidential intercourse with Lord Fisher, who would

characteristically sign his letters 'Yours till Hell freezes,' or 'Yours till the Angels smile on us,' or 'Yours till a cinder.'

*From Lord Fisher.*

FERNE, DONHEAD, SHAFTESBURY, *Dec.* 26, 1919.

MY BELOVED FRIEND,—We are going to Monte Carlo on February 15. (*We do so look forward to your being there!* I hope to get a villa about March 8, and could give you a room, I think, with great delight, but I will tell you about that later on.) But the object of this letter is to thank you for the *British Weekly* I have only just had time to open! (Observe, I 've taken it in for years!) The article is a Work of Art! and casts a 'Halo' round *Records*!

I 'm thinking of bursting out on Nelson. No one has adequately depicted his tenderness—he was three parts a woman! He never flogged a man. (My first Captain flogged every man in the ship! Savages then ruled us!) But Nelson has never been pourtrayed—dying a pauper because instead of chasing dollars he always chased the enemy! His one care—*the health of his sailors!* getting onions and oranges to prevent scurvy amongst them! and so on, and so on.

*To Lord Fisher.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Jan.* 2, 1920.

MY DEAR LORD FISHER,—Owing to the dislocations of the Christmas season I have not been able sooner to reply to your most kind and generous letter. You have done me a very great honour by your gracious invitation to be your guest on the Riviera, and I shall value the compliment all my life. But I am bringing my wife and my young daughter—both worshippers of you and most anxious to see you. As at present arranged we shall be at the Hôtel des Anglais, Mentone, early in February,

but I shall take the liberty of sending you the address when it is fixed. My son, who is a nerve specialist in Harley Street, is going to be married very soon, and we cannot fix up the journey until he fixes up his marriage day.[1]

I am delighted to hear that your mind turns still to Nelson. It is not an elaborate, detailed, documented account of him that we want. It is an explanation of his secret, a drawing out of his inner heart. No one comes near you in your power to extract the essential from the mass of non-essential matter. But I must not allow myself to be led into inflicting a long letter on you.

I have sent you a copy of the *British Weekly* containing a note on your exposition of the 121st Psalm, written by one of our best Hebrew scholars.

Will you give my most respectful and devoted homage to the Duchess of Hamilton, and accept for yourself my most affectionate regards.

Yours very sincerely,

W. Robertson Nicoll.

*From Lord Fisher.*

Hôtel Metropole, Monte Carlo, *Feb.* 27, 1920.

We are both *very very* sorry not to see you this journey. More especially as I desired your sage opinion whether (as I am pressed to do) I should write about Nelson (who is not yet understood). Jeremiah has only just been (rightly) recognized, in a new book recently written—*what a time for him to wait!*

Eventually Nicoll and his wife went to Mentone in February, and returned home in March after some delay through a French railway strike. When Lord Fisher died in July, Nicoll wrote a glowing tribute to him as a ' great and good man.'

[1] Dr. Maurice Nicoll was married on January 22 to Catharine, second daughter of the late Herbert Champion Jones of Mexico City, and Mrs. Champion Jones of Hastings.

*From Lord Riddell.*

[In reply to Nicoll's congratulations when the news was announced of his peerage.

20 Queen Anne's Gate, S.W., *Jan.* 4, 1920.

My dear William,—Your letter rejoiced me exceedingly. A real heirloom ! Our friendship has been one of the joys and honours of my life, and many of my happiest hours have been spent with you. The War was a trying and a testing time, and I shall ever remember the courage which my dear old Hampstead Lion exhibited during the most gloomy periods. Things might be looking bad, very bad, but he always saw a light shining round the corner. Of course I am proud of the compliments you pay me, but doubt if I deserve them all. Indeed, I am confident that the answer is in the negative. However, it is nice to feel that one is appreciated by a dear friend and companion. I can hardly imagine myself a peer, and, as a mutual acquaintance writes, 'in the revolution of 1924 peers will be of special use for decorating lamp-posts in the neighbourhood of Westminster' ! ! Meanwhile I have celebrated the peerage by having four teeth out, so am rather *hors de combat.* For the first time I sign at your behest and with my love,

Riddell.

Invitations to speak or to preach besieged Nicoll, but he now began to refuse them, with rare exceptions. In January he wrote to Mr. L. Sloan :

It was most kind of you and Mr. Will to ask me to respond to the toast of Scottish Literature at the Burns Club dinner. I feel that the request is a great honour, but nevertheless I am obliged to say No. The fact is, I find my own engagements as much as an old man can bear, and I have not the nerve now for making speeches in such a distinguished company as will assemble under your auspices.

To another similar request he replied in the same month :

> The only sermons or speeches I give now are in Strathbogie and Strathdon, when I go for my holiday. I regret that it is so, but I know by this time what I can do and what I cannot do, and I have worked hard.

Early in February 1920, Nicoll drew up a private memorandum giving his own judgment on the political situation. The following extracts show how he diagnosed the state of public affairs :

'It is useless to deny that certain members of the present Coalition Government are very unpopular, and that their action, or rather inaction, is severely criticized. The question which occupies the minds of many electors, to the exclusion of all others, is the question of Profiteering.

'They are concerned about how they are to live, and they are dismayed as new announcements come each day of increased prices and of the great prosperity of the wholesale profiteers. Unless the Government is able to face them frankly it is doomed. . . . I believe the nation has deeply marked the attitude of Auckland Geddes, and you know how he is regarded.

'Also, the disappointment about Housing has been great. No doubt it is partly unreasonable, but something might be done to show that something is being done and that there is a move forward. When Addison talks about a generation before we can house the people decently, it turns everybody sick. The brain of the country outside the Government is doing something which the Government ought to have done. . . .

'As I venture to think, Lloyd George's course is to form a Democratic party which shall be a Constitutional party. The foe to fight is direct action, which means strikes of a murderous kind. In fighting these and insisting on all matters being settled in Parliament Lloyd George would have behind him not only the Conservatives and Liberals, but also a large portion of the Labour party. This would allow understanding

with the Labour party on various points. With Lloyd George at the head of such a party things would go well. No doubt he would lose a certain number of the Tory extremists, but he is bound to do that under any circumstances.'

*To Lord Riddell.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *March* 19, 1920.

'Ergophobia' is made up of two Greek words—the fear of work. There used to be some ten years ago a good deal of writing on that topic by American psychologists. I have been subject to the malady all my life, and I suppose it will kill me.

In the closing years of his life Nicoll had no more passionate desire than to cement Anglo-American friendship. In American books and people he took keen interest. He had in the States many warm friends and admirers, such as Mr. George H. Doran, the well-known publisher, who succeeded to the publication of the American *Bookman*. In May 1920 he wrote: 'Anything that will promote closer bonds between America and this country has always received and will receive my warmest support and sympathy.'

*To Mr. James Milne.*

[HAMPSTEAD], *July* 1920.

I hope to go north on Thursday for six weeks. I have discovered that my house at Lumsden is just within Strathbogie, where it borders Strathdon. I always thought it was on the Strathdon side, but it is not so. It is fair, however, is it not? that the honours should be distributed!

During his stay in Aberdeenshire Nicoll much enjoyed a visit to Dr. James Hastings at Kingussie.

In the autumn there was published the volume 'Letters of Principal James Denney to W. Robertson Nicoll, 1893-1917,' commemorating their friendship.

Early in October Nicoll received the honorary degree of D.D., conferred on him by the Presbyterian

*Photo. Lafayette, Ltd.*

At Hampstead, December 30, 1920

College, Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the occasion of the centenary of that institution.

*To Miss Marie Corelli.*

*Nov.* 3, 1920.

I have read your book[1] with great pleasure, and will write something about it. It is full of pure wisdom and good feeling. I always think of you in connexion with my old friend Dr. Parker, who liked nothing so much as to lie on his sofa and hear your books read to him.

In the course of his later life Nicoll formed a close friendship with Mr. D. C. Lathbury, one of the last of the great Victorian journalists. This gifted veteran had served on the staff of the *Saturday Review* in its early and very brilliant period. He collaborated with R. H. Hutton and Meredith Townsend in the palmy days of the *Spectator*, and he had also worked with Frederick Greenwood. For many years Mr. Lathbury was known as the successful editor of the *Guardian*. Later on, he founded the too short-lived *Pilot*. In his old age he occasionally wrote signed articles for the *British Weekly*. On his ninetieth birthday, December 16, 1920, a company of admirers gathered to congratulate him in the Pensions Chamber of Gray's Inn. Bishop Gore presided, and Nicoll made a charming and characteristic speech, in which he confessed that when he was a young minister in Scotland he had become a regular subscriber to the *Guardian*.

A dinner at the House of Commons was given in honour of Nicoll on December 16, 1920. Mr. J. Hugh Edwards, M.P., who had organized the function, presided, and about forty members were present. Apologies for absence on pressing business were read from the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law. Mr. Lloyd George wrote : ' In common with those of you who will be entertaining him, I hold Sir William in very high esteem. The brilliancy of his editorship of the *British Weekly* has justly secured for him a commanding

[1] 'The Love of Long Ago : and Other Stories.'

place among the leading journalists of this generation, while the clarion note of his leadership has rallied the ranks of Nonconformity to the support of great humanitarian causes throughout his long and distinguished career as editor and publicist.'

The Rt. Hon. Robert Munro,[1] Secretary for Scotland, proposed the health of the guest in a telling speech. Born in a Ross-shire Free Church manse, he had himself been educated at Aberdeen Grammar School, and he was then representing Kelso in Parliament. Two other members of the Government—Sir Tudor Walters and Mr. Herbert Lewis—and Sir William Sutherland also spoke. In his reply Nicoll characteristically suggested to his hosts some books which members of Parliament ought to read. He instanced in particular the 'Letters of Junius' and the works of Burke and Sydney Smith, mentioning also such writers as Macaulay, John Stuart Mill, Bagehot, Goldwin Smith; John Bright's speeches, Disraeli's 'Sybil,' and 'the royal series of books by Anthony Trollope, beginning with "Phineas Finn."'

This unusual compliment to a journalist naturally gave Nicoll keen personal gratification. He told Miss Stoddart: 'It was a real demonstration of human kindness. You would have been pleased and surprised to see how the paper has really been appreciated. I felt it was encouraging in that sense. . . . If you had been at that dinner you would have seen that it is quite worth our while to make the *B.W.* as good as we can.'

Another happy family event brightened the close of 1920 for Nicoll and his wife. On December 30 their daughter Mildred was married to Lieutenant Grange Inglis Kirkcaldy, of the Black Watch.

In the first week of January, Dr. Alexander Whyte died at Hampstead, where he had been spending his closing days at a house in Church Row, quite near Bay Tree Lodge. Like Sir James Barrie, Dr. Whyte had been born and bred at Kirriemuir.

[1] Now Lord Alness.

*From Sir James M. Barrie.*

ADELPHI TERRACE HOUSE, STRAND, W.C.,
*Jan.* 9, 1921.

Do you remember how, early in the life of the *British Weekly*, I wrote some papers for you on Scottish worthies, which were afterwards published as a little volume under the title 'An Edinburgh Eleven,' and how Dr. W. G. Grace came across it and tossed it aside on discovering that not one of my eleven could bat or bowl? When I read that Dr. Whyte was dead I unearthed, with some difficulty, a copy of that volume to read what I had written of him so long ago, and to my bewilderment I find that he was not one of the eleven, though his name occurs. How that came about I do not know —he might so well have been their captain, he or Masson, for those were certainly to me the two great names in Edinburgh at that time. Perhaps he seemed too near to me, and too dear, to be written about, for I had known him all my life, and sat at his feet from the beginning thereof, and always felt an awe of that leonine head. To know him was to know what the Covenanters were like in their most splendid hours. This may seem to lay too much stress on the sternness of him. He could be stern certainly, and then if you were its object you felt a gale of wind blowing that you were not likely to forget, but it was a face far more often lit up by delight in something fine that he had discovered; and wherever there were fine things he was the man to dig them up. He came to announce his discoveries with greater joy on his face than I think I have ever seen on the face of any other man. The fervour of his face, the beneficence of it, they will shine on like a lamp. His greatest genius lay in 'uplift.' He uplifted more men and women than any other Scotsman of his time.

During the early spring of 1921 Nicoll spent a month at Eastbourne, instead of venturing to the south of France.

*To Mr. Clement K. Shorter.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *April* 26, 1921.

You will know more about seventy when you attain that venerable age. My whole time is taken up with journalism and publishing. If I have any margin I am going to produce a large book of reminiscences on a new plan. I have a great deal of unpublished matter, and I think that with leisure I could make it interesting. It would be two volumes.

In June Nicoll was staying at the Royal York Hotel, Brighton, when the Labour Party held a Conference in that town. He attended two of the meetings as a visitor, and followed the proceedings with keen interest from a seat on the platform.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

HAMPSTEAD, [*early in*] *June* 1921.

You will remember that nearly two years ago now I was thrown from a motor car in Portsoy. I did not seem to be hurt at the time, but trouble developed in my little finger which has caused me a great deal of pain and inconvenience and is not better yet. It is my right hand ; and though I can write a little in emergency, it is so painful that I hardly write anything with my own hand. This will explain why I am writing now by dictation, and will also explain in a measure why I have not written before.

*To Sir John Clark.*

HAMPSTEAD, *June* 1921.

I read with the greatest interest and sympathy what you say about your own health. I feel that we are both of us in a sense victims of the War. I know I have been on the edge of a severe breakdown. I go on with my work, but at my age it is a strain. I fought like others as hard as I could during the War to try to keep up the spirits of our

people. But the reaction comes, and I have no doubt that you are feeling it as well as I.

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

[After forty-three years' service Nicoll's old friend had decided to retire from his charge as minister of Leslie and Premnay United Free Church, Aberdeenshire.]

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *June* 17, 1921.

It gave me a curious thrill some time ago to read in the *Aberdeen Free Press* that you had offered your resignation to the Presbytery. I was not exactly surprised, but what happens to one of us seriously affects the other—we have been so closely associated. I have no doubt at all that you have done the right thing and taken the right way. You have much to be thankful for in the retrospect of your long and successful ministry. You might with your abilities have looked to a charge more in the eyes of the public, but I believe your heart lay rather in country life and work, and I am convinced that no one could have done that work better in all the spheres you have occupied. Like all country ministers you have had your trials. After a time you too found the current running against you, and it is not so easy to work with this consciousness. But you had many encouragements, made many friends, influenced many lives, and made yourself a great and salutary influence in all your district. You and I have both dug deep graves, but we have had a great deal to be thankful for. You will have many pleasant memories accompanying you to your retreat, and you will leave friendships behind you that only death will break.

As for myself, I do not really know what to say. I am pretty well in health, eat well and sleep well, but I am shaky with a kind of rheumatism, which makes it awkward for me to climb stairs or descend them, and my walking powers are very limited. Perhaps they may increase a little at Lumsden. I

can manage about an hour comfortably in the open air, but that is all. But what can we expect? We Three Musketeers have stood the siege of many a laborious year.

I think that Rust and you and I have lived and worked a great deal more than you and I anticipated on the day we met first at the door of Babbie Law.[1]

At the end of May a letter from the Prime Minister informed Nicoll that the King had been pleased to approve that he should be 'appointed a Member of the Order of Companions of Honour on the occasion of His Majesty's Birthday.' This select Order has for its motto, 'In action faithful and in honour true.' The distinction was formally conferred at an Investiture held in Buckingham Palace on July 19th. Nicoll's personal pleasure on the occasion was enhanced by the fact that at the same Investiture his dear and devoted colleague Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams, who had been knighted in 1919, received the decoration of C.V.O.

On the day following the Investiture, Nicoll had an attack of fainting. His wife at once arranged to take him to Lumsden, where he stayed for nearly two months at the Old Manse, resting and to some extent recuperating.

*To Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

LUMSDEN, *Aug.* 25, 1921.

I have not done any honest work here, but I hope I may get strength to go through another winter, which I should like for various reasons.

I have diminished my smoking by one half in cigarettes, but I am afraid I take it out in pipes. Still, it is an honest effort, and deserves the recognition of all good men.

[1] This queer title was then applied to the Free Church College, Aberdeen, by its own students. The Rev. W. M'Robbie explains how it originated. Close by the College entrance there stood in those days a small provision shop kept by an old woman named Babbie Law, whose signboard displayed the strange device: 'B. Law. Late with John Dunn.'

*To Mr. James Milne.*

LUMSDEN, *Aug.* 1921.

The book which I hoped to write was a history of British journalism in the Victorian era.[1] I am not without hope of being able to use in some form part of the material I have accumulated, but I shall never have the strength for the really elaborate work which for years I had in my mind.

Before he went south from Aberdeenshire Nicoll was able to take part in a meeting held at Premnay to bid farewell to his deeply-attached friend, the Rev. W. M'Robbie. At that meeting Nicoll delivered what proved to be his last public speech. He recalled how he had first met Mr. M'Robbie in Aberdeen, fifty years before, when they were being examined in Hebrew for admission to the Free Church College, and how the two young men, with their fellow-student the Rev. Alexander Rust of Arbroath, had then formed a comradeship which remained still unbroken. 'These two friendships are the strongest friendships in my life, and I think I may say that my life has been unusually rich in friendships.' Finally he reminded the meeting that 'those who love God never meet for the last time.'

Nicoll returned from Lumsden to Hampstead on September 17; but, as he confessed to his wife, 'it was rather a wrench coming home.'

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 24, 1921.

I have never enjoyed a meeting more than your farewell gathering, and I am thankful for the opportunity I had of being there. I thought the spirit shown was all that could be desired, and I cannot but think that it makes up for many a long, lonely, rainy evening in which your heart has been heavy. But that is all past. You are called upon to rest, and that is what you must do. I made some reference

[1] In the *British Weekly* of March 22, 1917, 'Claudius Clear' wrote: 'I have almost completed a history of the periodical press in Victorian times, but I deal only with weekly, monthly, and quarterly reviews.'

in my 'Things in General'[1] to the meeting, as much as I could manage.

I am back again, but with a grudge against you. I felt when I saw you that I would gladly be in your place and free from responsibilities to any one. But I do not see any immediate prospect of a change, though it may come when we do not look for it, for we are well within the range of the rifle-pits now, both of us.

*To Dr. James Moffatt.*

[Who had just celebrated the semi-jubilee of his ordination.]

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 24, 1921.

Yes, my dear friend, it is a solemn thing to pass through the first twenty-five years of a ministry and then look back. But at your time the best of your years are coming, as the old woman said to Robert Burns. You have acquired an immense influence, and you have done so in the most honourable way, and I hope you will be more and more a leader of the Christian forces when the battle seems to go against them. As for your silver wedding, that is surely a blessed thing to thank God for, and I know no man who will more thoroughly experience this feeling.

I am in a very strange predicament myself. On October 10, if I live, I shall be seventy years of age. During nearly forty-eight of these I have held the status of an ordained minister. So it even looks possible, though not probable, that I shall see my fiftieth year as a minister. They say one minister out of every fifty reaches his jubilee, and so I may

[1] Under that heading in the *British Weekly* of September 22, Nicoll wrote of his friend's leave-taking: 'During forty-three years the population of his parish had diminished by nearly one-half. But the attendance at his church has been marvellously maintained. The farewell meeting was held on a harvest week-night with a congregation consisting largely of young men and women. Every speaker dwelt on the affectionate pastoral help which had done so much for them and theirs, and the atmosphere of the place was thoroughly and deeply Christian as well as affectionate.'

well wonder. I feel very thankful for all that, though I am not able to do any public speaking and have declined all invitations of that kind.

I look back upon my life, apart from the religious side of it, and the great impression I have is that of the extreme kindness I have received during its whole course. . . . Well, let us be thankful !

Nicoll's seventieth birthday, which fell on October 10, 1921, evoked an extraordinary outburst of esteem and regard. Letters and telegrams of congratulation poured in from friends far and near — including Mr. Thomas Hardy, Lord Rosebery, Mr. Edmund Gosse, Lord Aberdeen, Lord Burnham, General Bramwell Booth, Sir Henry Lucy, Lord Leverhulme, Canon William Barry, Sir W. M. Ramsay, and Father E. F. Russell. Generous paragraphs appeared in all sections of the press, headed by the *Times*, which printed a column of cordial appreciation, while the *Church Times* published another column overflowing with goodwill. Professor D. S. Margoliouth forwarded an address,[1] signed by himself and six other distinguished Oxford scholars, all contributors to the *Expositor*.

Sir Ernest and Lady Hodder-Williams gave a reception in honour of Nicoll at the Hyde Park Hotel on October 10. This was preceded by a small private dinner-party, at which the Prime Minister and Dame Margaret Lloyd George were present. In proposing the health of the chief guest Mr. Lloyd George uttered a charming little eulogy on ' one of his oldest and most valued friends.' Among the crowd of distinguished and representative people—in addition to relatives and family friends—present during the evening were the American Ambassador and Mrs. Harvey, Sir J. M. Barrie, the Duchess of Hamilton, Lord and Lady Riddell, Lady Frances Balfour, Lord Beaverbrook, Sir Leicester Harmsworth, Sir Anthony and Lady Hawkins, Mr. H. W. Massingham, Lord Dalziel, Mr. Stephen M'Kenna, Mr. A. E. W. Mason, Mr. Phillips

[1] This address, with Nicoll's reply, appeared in the *Expositor* for December 1921.

Oppenheim, Sir Robert and Lady Donald, Sir Frank and Lady Newnes, Mr. Thomas Marlowe, Sir Robert and Lady Perks, Colonel and Mrs. John Buchan, Sir Albert and Lady Spicer, Lord Buckmaster, Mr. G. R. Sims, Sir Arthur and Lady Conan Doyle, Dr. Christopher Addison, Mr. Hamilton Fyfe, the Rev. Dr. Jowett, Lord Shaw of Dunfermline, the Rev. Dr. Archibald Fleming, Sir Hedley and Lady Le Bas, Miss Beatrice Harraden, Sir William Sutherland, Sir William and Lady Berry, Dr. and Mrs. Burnett Smith, Mr. Pett Ridge, Mr. W. J. Locke, Sir Gilbert Parker, Mr. Robert Munro, Secretary for Scotland, Commander Locker-Lampson, Mr. Max Pemberton, and Mr. C. A. M'Curdy.

Such a personal tribute was almost without precedent in the history of journalism. It was paid to the *doyen* of London editors, the man who might be described as the father of the London Press. But Nicoll's friends noted that he himself had not strength enough for the strain of the function. Mr. Joseph Hocking writes : ' The last time I saw him was at the reception given on his seventieth birthday, when a brilliant assemblage gathered to do him honour. I had to come late, and he was sitting alone when I greeted him. " I 'm verra weary, Hocking," he said in his soft Aberdeen accent. " But surely it cheers you to see some of the best-known men in London met to pay their tribute to the work you have done." " Yes, it 's verra good of them," he answered, " but I 'm verra, *verra* weary." '

Among scores of birthday letters which Nicoll received we have space to quote only two or three. Mr. A. G. Gardiner wrote : ' I suppose we have disagreed on as many things as most men, and whatever these disagreements may have been they have never diminished my admiration for you as a master of our craft.' Dr. J. H. Jowett wrote : ' You have been a rich friend to countless thousands, and we feel we can offer no return. You have been the leading guide of the British ministry for the last thirty years, and we are all using some of your wisdom in lighting

the lamps of others.' Dr. J. D. Jones wrote : 'You have put us all in your everlasting debt by what you have done for us. No one has more bravely and consistently upheld the cause for which we Free Church folk stand.' To this last letter Nicoll replied :

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Oct.* 15, 1921.

Our sympathy is so entire in regard to the great matters that the bond between us is not likely to be broken while I live. But it is a solemn thing to be brought up to the completion of seventy years. I am thankful for many things, but I do not feel fit for much hard labour now.

# CHAPTER XXIII

## THE JOURNALIST

The preceding pages have illustrated Nicoll's exceptional powers and acquirements, and the no less remarkable and indeed heroic fashion in which he turned them to account. His ceaseless labour was carried on with indomitable energy and courage by a man who might have claimed exemption as an invalid. He has been known to dictate as many as 30,000 words in a week, and often two or three days of the week would be spent in bed. In the strenuous world of London journalism few even among the hacks worked harder. His own papers and magazines by no means exhausted their editor's fertility. Other journals and reviews, in this country and in America, were eager to secure his anonymous help. Thus, to give only a few examples, it is no secret that he contributed intermittently to the *Times* and to the *Times Literary Supplement*. His hand might often be traced in the columns of the *Daily Chronicle*. For a dozen years, down to 1907, his 'Literary Lounger,' signed 'O. O.,' formed a weekly feature in the *Sketch*. As late as 1921 he wrote an important signed article for the *Daily Mail*. He filled his hours with literary activity so manifold that the difficulty is to say where the results did not appear.

This burden of incessant and responsible work Nicoll shouldered without much visible strain. One of his former assistants[1] bears witness to his curious equanimity. It is true, indeed, that he could be irritable in dealing with certain persons, he did not suffer fools gladly, and not seldom the sun gazed, if it did not go

[1] Mr. W. Grinton Berry, to whom the present biographer is under no small obligation.

down, upon his wrath. Yet no reader of his articles would detect there the symptoms of a harassed, overdriven writer. However violently duties thronged and pressed upon him, no fever of hurry and worry invaded his veins. Each piece of work was handled as calmly as though there were nothing else in the world to be done ; calmly—but with a smooth rapidity that startled the normally industrious man. Another valued colleague, Mr. A. St. John Adcock, who for many years was associated with Nicoll in the editorship of the *Bookman*, has preserved [1] this revealing glimpse of the quickness and apparent ease with which he wrote :

'The late William Sutherland was an able, much-experienced journalist, and it took far more than ordinary journalistic efficiency to surprise him. During the great Tariff Reform struggle, years ago, he was connected with the *Daily Chronicle*, and told me of a little incident that had filled him with admiration. It had been arranged that Nicoll should call at the *Chronicle* office after a big meeting and write an article on the whole business for next morning's paper. "He drove up near half-past eleven," said Sutherland, "and I met him on the stairs carrying a bunch of Blue Books under his arm, and looking almost too frail to be fit for work. 'Can I have a stenographer?' he asked. 'I am going on somewhere else and can't spare more than twenty minutes.' No shorthand writer was available at the moment, so I said I would take down for him myself. He dropped into an armchair, turning over the Blue Books, and I was barely seated when he began to dictate. He went on in a low, even voice, without a break, touching in statistics from the Blue Books as they were needed, and never hesitating for a fact or a word till he was done. As he said the last word he got up, tucking the Blue Books under his arm, said in his subdued, Doric accents, 'Thank you, Mr. Sutherland. Do you mind correcting the proof for me?' and was gone before his twenty minutes were over. It was a masterly little

[1] In the *Bookman* for June 1923.

article, concise, clear, closely reasoned, on a complicated, controversial, highly technical subject, and there was no necessity for him even to hear it read over after it was dictated. He is the perfect journalist." '

Perhaps it was controversy which roused Nicoll to put forth his full strength. He took immense pains to master all the relevant facts, and then he pierced to the heart of the real question at issue. He could expound a case so that it seemed as clear as daylight. He could argue its claims till they appeared irresistible. He could plead with fervid moral passion. He could denounce with withering invective. During the successive controversies which arose on Education, on Protection, and—to name a very different subject—on Pantheism, his articles were often models of powerful and even ruthless reasoning. In every paragraph you felt the sword.

On the other hand, not many journalists were more versatile. For instance, after attending some public dinner as a guest he would write three columns of sparkling report, although he had not made a note ; yet every important and telling point in the speeches would be recorded with entire accuracy. He held that nothing needed more skill to write than good paragraphs, and he used to say that a paragraph ought to be like first-class conversation. He understood the art of selection and fastened unerringly on the pith of a narrative, while his immense and varied knowledge of men, life, and literature enabled him to give everything a brightening touch. He had an extraordinary *flair* for news. When a journalist went to interview Nicoll, it often happened that the tables were turned and Nicoll interviewed the journalist. He seemed to know all the secrets of Fleet Street and Paternoster Row. Indeed, he was so well informed that it was hard to find facts which he had not already heard. He had not to go to men—they beat a path to him and told him their plans and news. Hence his papers never became asylums for stale paragraphs. Few of his fellow-journalists failed to scan the 'Rambling

Remarks' in the *British Weekly*, where they so often found the freshest information mingled with the shrewdest forecasts about books and writers, signed by 'A Man of Kent.'

On the whole Nicoll was a thoroughly genial writer, but he had no illusions. Overrated and belauded persons soon sank to their true shape and dimensions as his searching eyes undressed them. His gorge rose at anything pretentious or slovenly. A man of rooted convictions, he had also very wide sympathies, especially in literature. He knew good work, and was too honest a critic to conceal his admiration even when his prejudices went strongly against the author. Indeed, he hated slashing reviews, he took a generous delight in the noble art of praising, and his published judgments on books were sometimes challenged as being too laudatory and lenient. He was in warm accord with the spirit of the following letter which he received from that masterly reviewer, Theodore Watts-Dunton.

2 The Pines, Putney Hill, S.W., *Feb.* 6, 1902.

I have read your words about poor Groome. I am afraid he was as a critic sometimes rather severe. But, as he told me, his feeling towards any new book was 'the very opposite of my own'—a queer feeling of antagonism, while mine is (as *he* expressed it) 'a queer feeling of soft sympathy.' I have a somewhat vivid imagination, and my mind pictures the anxious author when writing his book, and his anxiety as to how the press will receive it, and the anxiety of his wife and of his children (and especially of a certain pretty and sweet daughter whom I always credit him with) who open the *Athenaeum* on Friday with fluttering fingers; and I cannot for the life of me attack the book, even when perhaps it ought to be attacked.

Nicoll once boldly told the members of the Authors' Club: 'What authors want is praise, and nothing but praise. They will tolerate blame to a certain

extent, if it is accompanied by cordial recognition of their merits ; but it is appreciation they desire, and that is what they mean when they ask for criticism. There is a story of a backward lover who was driving with his sweetheart one cold afternoon. She seemed to be out of spirits, and the lover asked her how she felt. "I feel blue," was the answer. "Nobody loves me, and my hands are cold." "You should not speak in that way," was his reply. "God loves you, and your mother loves you, and you can sit upon your hands." Here, in a parable, we have the everlasting relation between the author and the critic.'

Literary criticism in the past had been as a rule in the hands of intellectual aristocrats, and so naturally it often became supercilious and even destructive. Literature existed for its own sake, and for the reviewer. Nicoll, however—as Mr. Sidney Dark[1] pointed out—' had an acute realisation that the public also existed ; that there were men and women in the street, in the shops and in the offices and in the back parlours, to whom the imaginative writer might have something to say that would brighten lives and make it easier to solve problems. With this in his mind, he always approached the literary artist, not with the idea of putting him through a sort of literary trial, not with the sardonic hope of putting him in his place, but with an inquiry. He was always eager to discover whether the writer has something to say which it would do the world good to hear. The old aristocratic conventions have been brushed aside. A new democratic conception of the mission of the literary artist has been created, and, while others have had their part in the creation, no man did more than Nicoll.'

We may quote the verdict of another acute judge who declared that, so far as in him lay, Nicoll made popular journalism literary, and he made religious journalism interesting.

In regard to journalism as a career Nicoll had a high and rigorous standard which he invariably held up to young men and women who begged for his advice as

[1] See his discerning article in the *Bookman* for October 1921.

to whether they should enter it. 'Journalism is one of the most difficult and exacting of all professions. . . . It is my firm conviction that it cannot be done nowadays without the devotion of the whole heart and life and the sacrificing of every other ambition.' 'I do not disguise from you that it takes rare qualities to make and maintain a success in journalism. It means quickness, alertness of faculty, unsparing industry, and the most rigid accuracy and punctuality.' He held that speed was one indispensable qualification. 'You ought to begin early, for it is in youth that you learn to be quick. It takes many people a whole day to get through an ordinary book, and another day to make up their mind about it. You ought to be able to read every word of an average 80,000-word book in three hours, and write your opinion of it in an hour. If such feats appear to you impossible you had better leave journalism alone.' 'What is valuable in a newspaper is freshness. Good copy is not what you read, but what you hear and see, and report from hearing and sight. There is no vitality in anything except what has been got by oneself.'

Nicoll himself appeared to possess the freshness of perennial vitality. Mr. J. L. Garvin sent him in 1911 this appreciative little tribute : 'Froude's saying that journalism grinds every life to powder seems to be true of almost every one but you. Every Thursday when my *British Weekly* comes I wonder how you do it.'

From first to last Nicoll had an enormous interest in journalism and everything connected therewith. He understood its vicissitudes as well as its triumphs, and he always felt profound compassion for the disappointments and hardships of writers who had failed and gone under. His 'Life of James Macdonell' he described as the earliest biography of a man who was a journalist pure and simple. One cherished project which he never carried out was to produce a history of journalism during Queen Victoria's reign. On that subject he had gathered extraordinary stores of information. He himself lived through the transformation of our journalism in the course of the last

forty years. He wrote in 1900 : ' Mr. W. T. Stead has done more upon the whole to influence present-day journalism than any other man.'

The following judgment expressed[1] not long before the War seems worthy of record : ' I have been very much disappointed with the place which women have played in modern journalism. There are certainly many extremely able and good women writers in the press, contributing valuable and valued work, which doubtless exerts much influence ; but it is as individual writers that their power is felt. They have not given any such great characteristic turn to journalism as I expected they would. Why it is I cannot tell. Perhaps their influence has yet to be felt.'

Nicoll always maintained that English journalism as a rule held a high and honourable standard. In a letter of 1918 to Sir Hall Caine he declared : ' What my experience has led me to believe is that journalists on the whole are a sound and conscientious body of men, though there are Judases among them no doubt. I have also a firm belief that the ring and *élan* which are essential to effective newspaper writing disappear when a man is writing for money against his conviction.'

We may also quote the following emphatic testimony of ' Claudius Clear ' :[2] ' I believe, and I know, that there is essentially much kindness and good feeling among journalists—far more than the public would be led to imagine by what appears in print ; and the Street of Ink is a friendly street—whatever any one may say to the contrary.'

Nicoll's own estimate of the qualities which go to make a first-class journalist may be gathered from this sentence in an article he wrote on ' Frederick Greenwood and E. L. Godkin ' : ' Both were lovers of righteousness, lovers of their country, absolutely fearless, unselfish, keen fighters, good haters, firm friends, masters of English prose.'

[1] In the *Scots Pictorial* of September 13, 1913.
[2] In the *British Weekly* of March 22, 1917.

Modern journalism covers many hidden tragedies. Even from its favoured sons it exacts a heavy sacrifice as the price of their success. Outside their own profession their names are hardly heard of. As a rule they must forgo the ambition to achieve enduring fame. It is true, indeed, that many illustrious authors who adorned our literature in the eighteenth century—Swift and Defoe and Addison and Fielding and Johnson—wrote for the press. But the modern journalist has to exist under far more stringent conditions. Even a habit of constant dictation becomes fatal to fine style. And the writer who must needs dilute himself day after day can rarely concentrate his whole soul into one great book which will live on after he is gone. He can never hope to walk, as Gibbon walked when he had written the last lines of his 'Decline and Fall,' under the acacias of Lausanne.

Nevertheless an able and faithful journalist has his own compensations. Most likely he could never have become a historian or a novelist or a poet of high rank. As it is, he works very hard and gives pleasure and instruction to countless readers. He seeks to understand, to describe, and even to guide movements and men. The books he issues may be too much like leading articles to survive: but they can be effective and popular, and their author will be remembered as a brilliant and versatile man. Nicoll himself maintained that many writers exercise their best influence as journalists. 'If R. H. Hutton, for example, had spent his strength in producing serious theological and philosophical works, he could never have done the work he did in England during a time of theological and political transition.'

From his own standpoint Nicoll would assuredly have endorsed the fine confession of faith which has just been published[1] by a distinguished living journalist:

'In journalism I looked for, and found, the means of working out and applying a philosophy of life, a

[1] 'Through Thirty Years, 1892-1922: A Personal Narrative,' by Henry Wickham Steed.

chance to help things forward on the road I thought right, a quest taxing to the point of exhaustion every energy of heart and brain, but having in it what I hold to be the true secret of happiness—constant striving towards ends which, even if they recede upon approach, yet reveal themselves, in receding, as truly worthy of pursuit.'

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE HUMANIST

NOTHING about Nicoll was more characteristic than his absorbing interest in human nature. He watched the vast movement of life, 'that immense and magic spectacle which from boyhood to old age fascinates the gaze of every man of imagination, and which would be his terror if it were not at the same time his delight.' [1] But for this observer the spell of the whole pageant lay in the personalities who played living parts therein. Any biography—whether of a poet or a prize-fighter, a cardinal or a merchant or a mechanic—would hold him enchained. He never grew weary of seeking to discover the hidden self which a biographer can partly reveal and which an author's own writings often betray. Though he loved books consumedly, the thing that mattered most for Nicoll was the man behind the book. He believed that real literature grows out of life, and that we can interpret a work of genius with far more assurance and rightness when we learn what was happening to the author at the time it was produced.

In a speech at the Whitefriars Club Nicoll propounded the thesis that we ought to adopt a fresh method for literary history; in this new form the author's life would be told so as to explain the genesis of his books. 'We know that Johnson wrote "Rasselas" to pay the expenses of his mother's funeral; if we look in his biography we shall find why this book was chosen for the purpose. Why did George Meredith write "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel" in a certain year? We may see from his letters that just

[1] Matthew Arnold: 'Lectures on Translating Homer.'

before he wrote it he had put under somebody else's charge the offspring of his first marriage ; the power of his imaginative mind conceived all the possibilities of a child travelling the rough road of life. Why did Dickens write " Great Expectations," returning in autumn to the midsummer of his genius ? There is a reply to this. Why did Charlotte Brontë write " Shirley " ? Here again there is an answer A complete history of English literature would include such problems as these.' Nicoll maintained that the enduring part of literature is autobiography in disguise. Without the personal element, no work even of fiction can be vital. ' In all the immortal books there are what some one calls touches of blood and of the Old Night, revelations of the inner secrets and last experiences of the soul.'

Moreover, if we are to understand the whole gamut of humanity, we must be at home not only on its heights but in its depths as well. Boswell records how Dr. Johnson kept up an intimate friendship with Mr. Welch ' who succeeded the celebrated Henry Fielding ' as a police magistrate for Westminster. ' Johnson, who had an eager and unceasing curiosity to know human life in all its variety, attended Mr. Welch in his office for a whole winter, to hear the examination of the culprits.' The same ' eager and unceasing curiosity to know human life ' moved Nicoll to explore many dark and devious by-ways in literature. He would take endless pains to decipher the stained and blotted characters inscribed on torn pages of men's experience. And assuredly something equivalent to this must be undertaken by every one who tries to see life steadily and to see it whole with compassionate, understanding eyes.

We may say of Nicoll, in the words of his friend Professor John Adams : ' Nothing that is personal could be regarded as alien to him, in whatever walk of life it was found. Personality had a peculiar charm for him, and if anything could justify the introduction of a new term, his special gift would almost entitle us to speak of him as a great " personalist." We often

admire the positive genius that some women have for understanding and applying genealogies. Nicoll had a similar gift on the higher plane of personality. At the mention of an individual he would bring out of the storehouse of his memory all manner of correlations between that individual and a score of others.'

Yet no humanist can be quite catholic. We discover boundaries to his mind and compartments in his nature. Predilection or prejudice can colour his opinions, while to him certain sorts of excellence will make little or no appeal. In Nicoll himself it was perhaps the Spartan rigour of his own youth which created a kind of intellectual asceticism. His judgments on great literature were ultimately ethical. It was this dominant moral strain which hampered his appreciation of some types of literature which fascinate a more robust temperament. For example, as Dr. J. M. Bulloch [1] points out, Nicoll lacked some of the ' couthie ' qualities of Burns, and he was hardly in complete sympathy with the broad English spirit which appears at its best in Chaucer, in the Elizabethans, and in Fielding. On the other hand, to quote the same able critic, ' he had perhaps a keener and wider knowledge of nineteenth-century literature than any of his contemporaries. That knowledge was really encyclopaedic and constantly illuminated by a sense of personality, of the human equipment of writers, which would have made him a magnificent diarist.' Nicoll himself used to say that in London of the last fifty years no one had possessed so intimate and thorough an acquaintance with the personal side of literary history as Dr. Richard Garnett, of the British Museum. But after Dr. Garnett died in 1906, his mantle fell upon Nicoll's own shoulders.

It was the broad humanist side of Nicoll which dictated his ' Correspondence of Claudius Clear.' The letters over this familiar signature expanded until they soon became an outstanding feature of the *British Weekly*. They were conceived and written in a genial, familiar vein, they came almost invariably from the

[1] In the *Bookman* for June 1923.

same hand, and they continued with hardly a break for more than thirty years. ' Claudius Clear ' ranged over an immense variety of topics. It was Dean Swift's housekeeper who declared that her master could write excellently on any subject, even a broomstick—whereupon the Dean justified her by doing so at once. In Schiller's ' Mary Stuart ' some one says of the heroine, ' everything becomes a weapon in her hand.' In similar fashion Nicoll's versatile mind found sermons in stones, tongues in trees, and copy in everything. A proverb or a paradox, the home of some famous scholar or a week-end in some quaint country town, an article in some forgotten review, or a problem of every-day conduct, or the habits of a pet cat—they were all grist to his mill. Week after week and year after year ' Claudius Clear ' went on with amazing fertility and freshness. Often he would discourse about some writer, ancient or modern. But, with all his own ardour for reading, he was too vividly concerned with actual men and women ever to become bookish. Indeed, Nicoll illustrated the famous dictum of Anatole France that criticism is an account of the soul's adventures among books.

The worthy critic of literature must have imagination, intuition, perception, and sympathy, together with wide knowledge and a catholic taste. Mr. Birrell bids us admire in Sainte-Beuve not only his restraint and good sense but in particular his insight, sympathy and feeling. In no mean degree ' Claudius Clear ' shared these qualities of the famous French man of letters. He took intense interest in everything connected with a great author, yet this curiosity was so human that it sought to unlock the secret of the author's personality and to explain how he came to produce his books. Moreover, in his finer literary criticism Nicoll showed not only fullness of knowledge but a wise and generous understanding. Competent judges of his work respected and admired the combination of gifts which it revealed. His grasp of curious detail went with a capacity for high and quick enthusiasm. By instinct he habitually referred all things to certain

ethical and spiritual standards ; yet at the same time he was possessed and controlled by a wholesome sense of humour.

For writing his ' Claudius ' articles Nicoll adopted a quiet, flowing, unaffected style. And in this style he attained a simple ease and directness which went home to plain people with the force of truth. He contrived to make them feel that they had always believed what he was telling them, though they had never seen it put so well in print before. Pascal used to say that the best books were the books which every man thought he could have written for himself. When the editor of the *British Weekly* once invited his readers to tell him which feature in the paper they liked best, a large majority voted for ' Claudius Clear.' And in this connexion we can cite ' Toby, M.P.' as witness : ' You may be interested to know the confession of a *blasé* journalist that, whilst I never (or hardly ever) read a leader in the morning papers, I always read " Claudius Clear." ' [1]

It is the irony of good journalism that the more aptly it serves its immediate purpose the more fugitive and ephemeral it must appear in retrospect. Few newspaper articles bear reprinting. As Nicoll himself admitted, there will always be thorns under the pillow of an essayist who collects his essays and publishes them in a book. Nevertheless, selected letters of ' Claudius Clear ' were gathered into four successive volumes,[2] each of which gained wide popularity. They stand apart from a crowd of similar books by reason of their urbane judgments, their humorous insight, and by the indomitable Christian hopefulness which underlies them all.

' Letters on Life ' contains a store of shrewd wisdom in regard to matters that we idly call commonplace. Again and again it touches the primary fibres of human nature. It deals with those elemental axioms which govern men's daily lives. ' Mark Rutherford '

[1] Letter from H. W. Lucy to W. R. Nicoll, December 31, 1907.

[2] 'Letters on Life,' 1901 ; 'The Day Book of Claudius Clear,' 1905 ; 'The Round of the Clock,' 1910 ; 'A Bookman's Letters,' 1913.

admired its style, ' so lucid, so precise, so entirely free from surplusage of words. But, better still, it seems to me to be experience, a wisdom you have learned, and, in fact, it might be called " Letters *from* Life." ' In the paragraphs where ' Claudius ' touches on problems of ethics the veteran Professor David Masson noted ' that particular quality which causes a reader to ejaculate every now and then *rem acu tetigit*. This is a finer and rarer variety of the feat commonly known as " hitting the nail on the head "—a thing you can do also most effectively when you like.' Indeed, one famous letter on ' Firing out the Fools ' hit the nail so effectively as to cause an explosion, and ' Claudius Clear ' was denounced as the advocate of competition in its ruthless, devil-take-the-hindmost form.

' The Day Book of Claudius Clear,' which came out four years later, is full of ' humanities,' treated with real catholicity and expanse of view. It included fine biographical tributes to men like George MacDonald, and R. H. Hutton of the *Spectator*, and Nicoll's much-loved college friend, Dr. R. A. Neil. Best of all, however, are those papers which deal with the conduct of life, written with benignant sagacity in a style that fits the matter like a glove and often twinkles with humour.

In 1910 there was published ' The Round of the Clock,' [1] in which ' Claudius Clear ' divided man's years into lustrums, and illustrated from hundreds of well-known persons the stages of experience from childhood on to extreme old age. It is a survey of the milestones of life.

Finally, in the year before the War, appeared ' A Bookman's Letters '—of which Nicoll wrote : ' I think the best of my " Claudius Clear " articles were published in that volume.' It consists of *causeries* about books and men, pervaded with the writer's wide knowledge and intimate sympathy. The sketches of Frederick Greenwood—' the greatest journalist of our time '—and David Masson, and ' Mark Rutherford,' are masterly studies in the psychology of men of letters.

[1] In 1919 Nicoll wrote to a lady in India : ' My own favourite among my books is " The Round of the Clock," which really gives my views on life.'

The whole volume has been well described as 'the kindliest of books—not in its tolerance towards its subjects only, but in the friendliness with which it treats the reader.' Except for one justly severe judgment on Robert Buchanan, the criticism here has notably ripened and grown mellow. Indeed, in his later years 'Claudius Clear' fell more and more into a kindly and gracious mood, which recalls Wordsworth's hope about his poems—that 'they might co-operate with the benign tendencies in nature and society.'

Among Christian humanists of our time, who were journalists as well, perhaps the finest example was Dean Church. A master of modern learning and literary perception, he possessed as well the ardour and strength of profound spiritual faith. He understood—as Nicoll understood—that religion is the fundamental reality of the human soul, and that literature, which is a manifestation of the same soul, must be indissolubly and inevitably knit up with religion. It is true indeed (as a recent writer [1] points out) that in so far as either of these may depart from its living centre, the bond between them may sometimes be hard to discern. When literature becomes a parlour game and religion a church-mummery, they seem alike only in deadness. But in their vital essence 'religion and literature are branches of the same everlasting Root.'

When Nicoll began the *British Weekly* in 1886, he tells us that it was with the conviction that 'much more might be done in the way of uniting religion and literature,' and that 'the Nonconformists had too long behaved as exiles [2] from the world of culture.' He recognised what a great advantage it had been for the High Church party that men like Keble and Newman

[1] See 'Romanticism and the Tradition,' by J. Middleton Murry, in *The Criterion* for April 1924.

[2] For this attitude there was in England a historic cause, which in Scotland never existed. At the time when Matthew Arnold used to shoot out his tongue at Dissenters as half-educated Philistines, they had been for nearly two hundred years rigorously barred out of both the great English Universities.

dealt frankly with imaginative literature instead of trying to put it down, as the Evangelicals did to their sore discomfiture and shame. In Nicoll himself there was a quite unusual blending of broad humanism, orthodox faith, and mystical fervour. The mark which he left on his time is undoubtedly deep and real. He exercised immense influence upon the development and expression of Evangelical religion during the last three decades, and it was an enlightening and humanizing influence. He sought to lead Christian thought and belief out into the spacious fields of learning and to acclimatize devout people in the atmosphere of literature. He quickened their desire to read, he guided inexperienced readers, he helped to popularize the best books. To raise the general level of intelligence and culture among churchgoing folk was no light task ; but Nicoll probably did more towards its accomplishment than any other man of his generation.

# CHAPTER XXV

## EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

'A GREAT many perplexing things happen to an editor. It is in many ways a hard and responsible business, and in the case of a widely circulated organ very responsible indeed.' These sentences illustrate the serious spirit in which Nicoll regarded his editorial work. For a man to be qualified for such work he must himself have probed and analysed the religious, literary, and political ideas of his time. He must be in personal touch with life and its varied problems. Moreover, in editing a religious newspaper it is more than ever necessary that the whole range of subjects in which men and women are interested should be dealt with from a frankly and distinctly Christian standpoint, especially now that the secular press inclines less and less to make definite Christian assumptions. On the other hand, the editor knows that readers of a religious journal to-day expect to find there the same qualities which they find in their secular papers. They are not prepared to put up with dullness, incompetence, or belatedness. They demand articles not merely devout in spirit but written with a certain amount of freshness, vitality, and vigour. And they want an informed and sympathetic outlook on the world.

These are some elements at least of the problem which Nicoll faced, and which he solved in the *British Weekly* with remarkable success through seven-and-thirty years. Yet beyond all this, the spell exercised by a great editor depends on something individual and indefinable. We may quote Sir J. M. Barrie's testimony to his friend: 'Seldom, I suppose, has there been an editor who was his paper so peculiarly

as Nicoll was. He made the *British Weekly* off his own bat—made it by himself out of himself; it was so full of his personality that he came stalking out of all the pages, meeting every reader face to face, so that it can truly be said he paid a visit every week to every person who took in the paper. Myriads of people must have grown up under his guidance, and learned many of the lessons of life from him, and, next to those who worked for him, they are the ones who will miss him most. But we, his contributors, who helped him to however slight an extent, will miss him most of all, remembering his thousand kindnesses, his glorious enthusiasms and the passion of his soul.'

To edit such a paper, always with a small staff and with his own hand in almost every page, might exhaust and satisfy any ordinary man. Nicoll, however, combined with this the editorship of at least three different monthlies—the *Expositor*, the *Bookman*, and the *Woman at Home*, besides his literary, social, and religious activities, which lay outside them all. His energy seemed indeed to have no limit. His fertile brain was always teeming with ideas for new journals of various types and sizes, which should appeal to fresh classes of readers. For instance, in 1903 he projected a popular halfpenny religious weekly, to be called the *Christian Mail*. In 1904 *Claudius Clear's Weekly* was planned, partly on the lines of T. P. O'Connor's well-known paper. In 1905 he contemplated the *Church Companion*, a penny religious journal, copiously illustrated and addressed mainly to Evangelical Church people. Another long-cherished scheme which never materialized was for a more popular *Spectator*, to be sold at a penny. *Ian Maclaren's Magazine*, a sixpenny monthly, would have been started in October 1899, but for the outbreak of the Boer War. Some of these plans, moreover, took practical if not permanent shape. *Success*, a penny weekly, appeared in August 1895, and continued with varying fortunes until it finally belied its name in September 1900. The *Christian Budget*, another penny

weekly which has been described as 'a kind of religious *Tit-Bits*,' was born in June 1898, and lived for just four years. The *British Monthly*, a sixpenny 'record of religious life and work,' profusely illustrated, began in December 1900, and lasted until December 1905.

When the *Bookman* came of age in October 1912, Nicoll wrote a sketch of its origin and growth, and confessed that he had hoped also to found a quarterly review wholly devoted to English literary history and criticism.

No wonder Mr. James Douglas declared with sardonic humour : 'Nicoll is not one man : he is an army of men, directed by one cool controlling brain. It is said that there is a journal which he does not edit, but it has not yet been discovered. I suspect that all the editors of the English-speaking world are Nicolls in disguise. This would explain the spectre of uneasy guilt that sits on every editor's brow. Everybody knows that all reviewers are pseudonymous Nicolls and all Nicolls are pseudonymous reviewers.'

As an editor Nicoll never grew fossil. He kept a sleepless watch for fresh writers, and was eager to enlist able recruits from the ranks of the new journalism. He used to tell this story about a certain Glasgow University student, M'Guffog by name, who was asked in class by Professor Ramsay to define instinct. 'He fixed his eyes severely on his teacher, and in a hoarse voice declared that instinct was the thirst for blood. He was not far wrong ! The editorial instinct is undoubtedly the thirst for new blood. The editor who simply employs the cabs on the ranks will never succeed. He must be continually on the outlook for the young men and women of promise.'

It ought to be said here that while Nicoll selected his contributors with very great care, he trusted them absolutely when they had been chosen. Unlike certain other editors, he rarely retouched or altered the articles he accepted, beyond correcting any obvious slips of the pen. None the less, he contrived to impress himself indelibly on each periodical he controlled.

In addition to his labours as editor and journalist,

Nicoll projected, edited, and carried to completion several highly important and successful series[1] of books. Foremost among them was 'The Expositor's Bible.' He originally expounded this scheme when Mr. T. W. Stoughton visited his manse at Kelso in 1884. Soon afterwards he wrote to Mr. Stoughton: 'There is no work I would more gladly try my hand at: it would be my monument. Seriously, in capable hands, this is an enterprise of great promise.' The enterprise involved securing and organizing the co-operation of nearly forty distinguished Biblical scholars. The first volume was published in 1887, and the forty-eighth and last in 1896. The whole remains one of Nicoll's monuments. Another laborious undertaking was 'The Expositor's Greek Testament.' Fifteen different scholars supplied the text and commentary for this work, which appeared in five volumes between 1897 and 1911. Less important series included 'The Theological Educator,' in fifteen volumes; 'The Household Library of Exposition,' in ten volumes; 'The Clerical Library,' in twelve volumes; and 'The Foreign Biblical Library'—ten volumes of translations. In a different category was the series of 'Literary Lives,' written by well-known men of letters, and dealing in separate volumes with Newman, Bunyan, Coventry Patmore, Matthew Arnold, Charlotte Brontë, Renan, Scott, Ibsen, and Pepys. Enough has been said, however, to indicate the amount of knowledge and labour required by an editor who organized and carried through these varied undertakings.

Sometimes Nicoll found it a desperate task to persuade certain authors that they must complete books which they had promised by a certain date. Even so loyal a friend as Dr. Marcus Dods rebelled against his taskmaster, and wrote in October 1895: 'Pharaoh might have taken lessons from you. Of the possibilities of sweating he had after all the faintest conception.' From his summer quarters at Aviemore in 1892, Dr. Alexander Maclaren wrote a similar complaint:

[1] Appendix III. to this biography contains particulars of these series, which were planned, prepared, and published under Nicoll's editorship.

'I wonder editors can sleep at night, depriving us of our holiday. It is worse than "robbing a pore man of his beer," which has long been regarded as nearly heading the count of official crimes. I hope that *you* are not having any holiday this autumn! It would be some alleviation to think of you as stewing in Paternoster Row.' From Mentone, twelve years later, the same pen wrote: 'We are having brilliant but somewhat cold weather, which I could utilize for walking if it were not for the menacing shadow of W. R. N.'

As literary adviser to a firm of publishers, it was part of Nicoll's duty to secure fresh authors and to commission the writing of new books—an anxious business which requires endless patience and tact and delicate judgment. But for this task he possessed unusual qualifications. Mr. Clement Shorter, who is no mean authority, testifies that Nicoll had 'perhaps the keenest scent for a book that will sell of any man in the book business.' Another shrewd friend said of Nicoll, 'He knows exactly where to get the men who will do what he wants done, and, further, he is always certain to make those men do what he wants.' His *flair* was extraordinary for discovering new authors who quickly became popular. Indeed, before long he fostered a literary movement, which was partly his own creation and partly one of the contributory sources of his influence. With patriotic discernment he found one Scotsman after another who introduced a fresh type of Scottish literature, and their books attained an immense circulation.

Foremost among these authors was J. M. Barrie, who, while he was writing leaders in the *Nottingham Journal*, had begun in 1884 to contribute to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, then edited by Frederick Greenwood. A year later he came up to London and continued writing sketches of Scottish life for the same editor, concerning whom he publicly confessed, 'Greenwood invented me.' But we may also quote from his own introduction to 'Auld Licht Idylls': 'In time, however, I found another paper, the *British Weekly*, with

an editor as bold as my first (or shall we say he suffered from the same infirmity ?). He revived my drooping hopes, and I was again able to turn to the only kind of literary work I now seemed to have much interest in. He let me sign the articles, which was a big step for me, and led to my having requests from elsewhere ; but always the invitations said, " Not Scotch—the public will not read dialect." By this time I had put together from these two sources and from my drawerful of rejected stories this book of " Auld Licht Idylls," and in its collected form it again went the round. I offered it to certain firms as a gift, but they would not have it even at that. And then on a day came actually an offer for it from Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton. For this and many other kindnesses I had the editor of the *British Weekly* to thank.' A similar tribute occurs in ' Margaret Ogilvy ' (pp. 73-74) : ' I did my best to turn the " Auld Licht " sketches into a book with my name on it. . . . And at last publishers, sufficiently daring and more than sufficiently generous, were found for me by a dear friend [Nicoll], who made one woman " very uplifted." He also was an editor, and had as large a part in making me a writer of books as the other [Greenwood] in determining what the books should be about.'

Barrie's earliest articles in the *British Weekly* were signed ' Gavin Ogilvy.' The first appeared on July 1, 1887, and he became a regular contributor to the paper. In its columns were first published part of ' Auld Licht Idylls,' the greater part of ' A Window in Thrums,' the novel ' When a Man 's Single,' and the series ' An Edinburgh Eleven.'

In this connexion we ought to quote Nicoll's own words : ' Of Barrie's career I need say nothing except this, that nothing in it has surprised me in the least. From the day I first knew him I never doubted that he would come to the first place and that he would keep it.' [1]

[1] Nicoll was fond of telling how ' when I received the MS. of " Jamie's Homecoming," which concludes " A Window in Thrums," I telegraphed to Barrie the one word " Immortal," and by that word I stand.'

Earlier in this volume we have described how Nicoll discovered Ian Maclaren, who said himself concerning 'Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush': 'The real reason why I wrote these sketches was that Nicoll asked me to do so. So far as I know, I should never have written them without that request.' In 1898 Dr. Watson dedicated his book 'The Potter's Wheel' to 'W. Robertson Nicoll, who constrained me to write.'

S. R. Crockett confessed his own debts in a message sent for Christmas 1897: 'The *British Weekly* said the first good word for my first book. You showed kindness unspeakable to a man unknown and discouraged. You are, sir, of the great company of the encouragers, who make the wheels of the world go round. More power to your elbow.'

As the daughter of Sir Henry Fowler (afterwards Viscount Wolverhampton), a distinguished Liberal Cabinet Minister, Miss Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler had the advantage of moving in London society and being also a member of the Wesleyan Church. Nicoll went to her and asked whether she could not write a novel dealing truthfully with Nonconformity, as he felt that Nonconformity was seldom treated by novelists in the right way. The result was 'Concerning Isabel Carnaby,' Miss Fowler's first story, which appeared in 1898 and obtained a great popular success.

The well-known author 'Annie S. Swan' (Mrs. Burnett Smith), who contributed for over thirty years to Nicoll's papers and magazines, bears this emphatic testimony to her editor, who was also her close personal friend: 'I want to say of him that he was a great comforter and he was a great encourager.'

We might illustrate Nicoll as a great encourager from the mouth of many witnesses. In November 1906 Mr. Harold Begbie wrote: 'I wonder if you have forgotten how years ago a sad-souled young journalist sought your advice and encouragement and was bidden by you to set about writing a novel, as his style suggested to you narrative and dramatic powers? I have never forgotten that advice, and behind all my struggles there has been the stimulation of that good opinion.'

The following letter from the late Arnold White, dated October 8, 1910, Windmill Cottage, Farnham Common, Bucks, may also be quoted : ' I was never more surprised in my life than when you spoke so kindly of my work yesterday at the Club. I had heard that you were a cold and masterful man who would never allow one who is not connected with your Party and Creed to have a look in. Your generosity yesterday made me gasp, as I had the idea that you hate everything I hold dear and that I could not look for a kind word from so powerful an arbiter of literary destiny as yourself. I was mistaken, and therefore write to thank you.'

Nicoll already lay stricken in his last illness when he received this letter from Mr. William Le Queux :

> 93 Marina, St. Leonards-on-Sea, *Dec.* 15, 1922.
>
> Now, at the close of another year, I want to express my thanks to you for the very much you have done for me through *all* my career ! We never meet now, but I always feel the deepest debt of gratitude to my ' literary father '—to whom I am entirely indebted, and whom I respect as a ' literary man ' and a real critic among us who have to scribble to please the public. It was Zola who urged me to become a novelist, and it was you who discovered that I could interest the public.

Mr. Vincent Brown, author of ' A Magdalene's Husband,' wrote to the present biographer on December 24, 1923 : ' Yet, if you should be naming authors who owe him a great debt of gratitude for his big-hearted encouragement in their early struggles, I should be very glad if you could include me as one.'

Apart from his work as a publisher, it was Nicoll's discerning and persistent praise which compelled the public to recognize the lonely genius of ' Mark Rutherford,' and there were few achievements of which he felt more proud. Nicoll, again, was one of the very earliest to point out the supreme merit of Mr. Arnold Bennett's ' The Old Wives' Tale,' and his eulogy in

the *British Weekly* of that masterpiece paved the way for its popularity in America His encouragement proved of real value to Mr. John Buchan, and he had no small share in drawing attention to the singular gifts of Mr. Leonard Merrick.

We owe a deep debt to men who can perceive and foster literary promise. Surely, says Lord Shaw, he is no trivial benefactor who among masses of commonplace has discerned a really living spark, and given it room in what might else have been a smothering world.

Mr. Joseph Hocking, the novelist, has been good enough to send some personal recollections, which may be inserted here :

' It was about the year 1898 that I first met Nicoll—in his library at Frognal, surrounded by what looked like a mountain of musty papers. " I want you to write a serial for the *British Weekly* about Methodism," he said, " something that will reveal its inwardness, its peculiar characteristics, its fervour, its fire." So I wrote " O'er Moor and Fen," a story which aroused many protests. But he took no notice of them. " I trust you, Hocking," he said ; " I believe you'll tell the tale as it ought to be told." I continued to work for the *B.W.* right on till his death, and that was his attitude towards me all the time. He trusted me.

' Some have alleged that he had a habit of discarding his authors mercilessly, of sucking their brains dry and then leaving them in the lurch. But that is not my experience. From first to last he was always encouraging, always loyal.

' Moreover, Nicoll was perhaps the most helpful editor I ever worked for. He seemed to understand by intuition what I was trying to get at. In one story I had come to a *cul de sac*, and could see no way out. I picture him now, as he sat in his library, listening. Then suddenly he rose and came towards me with kindling eyes and hand uplifted. " He maketh His ministers a flame of fire ! " he cried with all the intensity of passion. There was inspiration in the words, and my difficulty was at an end.

' I desire to say something about Nicoll's generosity.

Of his attitude to others I know nothing. I simply speak from my own experience. After I had written three or four serials for the *B.W.*, he asked me to call and see him. "I want you to write me another story," he said, and added words too flattering to repeat. "And look here," he continued, "I mean to pay you £100 more for this next story. You 've done well for me, and I want to recognize it." No other editor, without even the hint of a suggestion on my part, ever showed me such munificence.'

In an address at the Authors' Club in 1910, Nicoll summed up certain results of his own experience among London publishers:—'When I compare the publishing world as it was in 1886 and as it is in 1910 I see great changes. . . . The revolt against the three-volume novel had distinctly begun, but I think it was not till 1894 that the three-volume novel finally disappeared. It was replaced by the six-shilling novel, which seems to have answered the purpose of authors and publishers very well. Whether the six-shilling novel is to hold its ground remains to be seen.

'The great difference between publishing in 1886 and publishing in 1910 is that in the former year the author was still seeking the publisher, whereas in the latter the publisher is seeking the author. Speaking broadly, and allowing for many exceptions, the attitude of the publisher twenty-five years ago, and long before, was somewhat supercilious, or, I should say, suspicious. In particular, it was not easy for a new writer to get a start, especially if he struck a new vein. Now, the chief anxiety of every publisher who understands his business is to secure a new author of power. The publisher knows that among the manuscripts he finds on his table may be a book by some new Kipling or Barrie. The author nowadays may be certain that if he has any claim to attention at all, he will receive it to the full.' Since 1886 the literary agent[1] had come into being. Nicoll declared his

[1] 'Claudius Clear' in the *British Weekly* of November 12, 1914, wrote a fine tribute to the character and career of his friend the late Mr. A. P. Watt, who created this profession.

belief that literary agents as a rule conducted their business skilfully and on the whole in the interests of both publishers and authors. 'I am persuaded that on the whole the system of agency, when it has fair play and is in good hands, works well for all. But on the general subject of publishing I have but one opinion, and that opinion is a dogma. Publishing is not so simple as it seems to many people. For that dogma I would go to the stake.'

At this point it is proper to say something about the publishers with whom Nicoll worked in the closest co-operation for more than half his lifetime. The firm of Hodder & Stoughton dates from the year 1868, when Mr. Matthew Henry Hodder and Mr. Thomas Wilberforce Stoughton entered into partnership at 27 Paternoster Row, where their predecessors, Messrs. Jackson, Walford & Hodder, had published mainly religious books of an evangelical type. They soon achieved considerable success, launching out on broader lines and establishing important connections with America. In 1883 they published Drummond's 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World,' which won immense popularity.

The firm's association with Nicoll began in the summer of 1884, when (as has already been narrated) he undertook to edit the *Expositor*. This inaugurated a relationship which developed through a long series of years, with results which proved on both sides to be momentous and valuable. In the spring of 1886 Nicoll suggested to Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton that they should found a new penny weekly religious newspaper. Such a project demanded no small courage on the part of the proprietors, and involved the risk of considerable capital. But they had confidence in their editor, and from the outset gave him an entirely free hand. It was not, however, until its second or third year that the *British Weekly* became fully established and really profitable.

From the end of 1886 onwards Nicoll also acted as Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton's literary adviser. Though he was never a partner in the firm, his re-

sponsibilities increased as its business enlarged, while the friendship between him and his employers only deepened and strengthened as time went on. Each increasingly depended upon the other, and their harmonious co-operation continued unbroken to the very end.

In this happy result another personal factor played a highly important part. Mr. Hodder's grandson, Ernest Hodder-Williams, entered the business at Paternoster Row in 1891, beginning when he was only fifteen as a member of the staff of the *British Weekly*. He was speedily brought into close relations with Nicoll—relations which, as will be seen from the letters printed in this volume, steadily grew closer and ripened on both sides into unusual intimacy and affection. In 1902 Ernest Hodder-Williams was made a partner in the firm, and finally rose to be the head of the business, now removed to St. Paul's House, Warwick Square. Long before this, however, he had become practically the individual link between the firm and its distinguished editor and adviser. During Nicoll's later years the burdensome duty of dealing with authors and obtaining new books was being gradually and naturally transferred to his younger colleague, who in the closing twelvemonth of Nicoll's life also shared with Miss Stoddart a large part of the editorial responsibility for the *British Weekly*.

The relations between Nicoll and Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton were such that each became practically indispensable to the other, and both cordially recognized the situation. To illustrate this we may quote the following letter, written after the *British Weekly* had been established for six or seven years.

*To Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD,
*Jan.* 15 [1898 *or* 1899].

MY DEAR SIRS,—You might have said much more with perfect truth as to my obligations to you. They are infinite. From the time you generously trusted

the *Expositor* to an unknown man till now I have had ever new experience of your enterprise, liberality, and confidence. Without you I do not think I should ever have been able to do anything. This I have constantly acknowledged, and I have tried to do the best I could in return. With whatever mistakes and shortcomings, I can honestly say I have spared nothing in the way of unremitting labour ; I could not have done more than I have done. As to money I have not the smallest ground of complaint : quite the contrary. As a rule you yourselves have proposed terms and increases which I thought not only fair but liberal. . . .

Yours very sincerely,
W. R. Nicoll.

Briefer, but none the less expressive, is the following note from Mr. Stoughton to Nicoll :

Lynton, Beulah Hill, S.E., *Jan.* 4, 1899.

I cannot express the indebtedness I have always felt to you for all you have done for us, and this sentiment will always be cherished by

Yours very sincerely,
T. W. Stoughton.

With consistent generosity and gratitude the firm of Hodder & Stoughton carried out their obligations to the man who so largely helped to transform their publishing business from what it was in 1886 to what it is to-day.

On the death of Mr. Hodder in October 1911, Nicoll paid his old friend a noble tribute of personal regard on the front page of the paper which they had co-operated in founding. When Mr. Stoughton died in 1917 [1] Nicoll wrote in the *British Weekly* : ' I knew him with a thoroughness and an intimacy which could not be surpassed. . . . Since the day, now far in the

[1] Soon afterwards, the firm became Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., its present directors being Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams, C.V.O., Mr. R. Percy Hodder-Williams, and Mr. Ralph Hodder-Williams. Mr. Cecil Stoughton retired from business in 1923.

past, when I first saw him at my house in Kelso, though we were often engaged together in very difficult and delicate negotiations, there was never a shadow of displeasure between us.' And four years later in a letter to Mr. Cecil Stoughton, he referred to 'your beloved father—one of the best friends I ever found in this world.'

# CHAPTER XXVI

## ON THINGS THEOLOGICAL

SIDE by side with his devotion to literature, Nicoll had another passion, even more dominating and controlling. His supreme interest lay in Christian theology as attested by Christian experience. At the bottom of his soul this accomplished man of letters always remained a sincere and humble believer. He had brooded deeply over the dark problems of our humanity. He had mastered the classics of the inward life. To him the solemn realities of evil and of redemption appeared as the chief concerns of man—and of God. His mind was preoccupied with the secrets of human sin and Divine atonement. He loved to trace through modern literature the persistence of the haunting spiritual problems of guilt and remorse, of expiation and retrieval.

Nicoll's religious writings show that, next to the mystery of atonement, no Christian truth possessed his thought like the doctrine of immortality. For him, the further pier of the bridge that spans life could rest only on the unseen shore. Before his own great bereavement he had published 'The Key of the Grave.' Twenty-five years later, when the War had made Europe into a cemetery, he published 'Reunion in Eternity.' We may say of him that 'he saw the sacred colours luminous through age and death.'

His biographer has decided to group together here some personal letters in which Nicoll discussed those religious problems which were never absent from his own mind. The ideas herein expressed, with the frankness of intimate friendship, illuminate and even supplement what he poured out for so many years in his papers and his books.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *March* 2, 1894.

You will, I fancy, admit something miraculous in the eradication of sin at death. It will not do, with Delitzsch, to speak of intercourse with spirits as purifying. The purification takes place before that —and is from above. I suppose that wherever prayers for the dead have been a reality, the complete extinction of sin has been denied—*i.e.* prayers and purgatory go together. But I have not got up the dogmatic.

I am thinking a good deal about Justification by Faith. The doctrine is as good as ever, but it wants restating, for I think we are getting away from it. Thus Whyte's lectures seem to me to be all based on justification by works. So is William Law. Thus, there is never a real peace. Nor is there a real distinction drawn between the forgiven and the unforgiven—though (in spite of Candlish) I think justification certainly means more than pardon. That is why Whyte always insists on your calling yourself a dog or a worm. But 'ye are a royal generation.'

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *July* [9], 1894.

I am still working at the Remission of Sins. It looks queer to say such a thing—but I really can't find any free discussion of it in English, or any discussion at all of many points connected with it. But I find a good deal in French Catholic writers—de Maistre and the Duc de Broglie especially. I feel that the key to the whole is that the New Testament writers think of forgiveness as the clearing away of God's condemnation, and how that condemnation expresses itself in providence they decline to define. But it has an expression.

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *July* 22, 1894

I was much struck recently by noticing how St. Paul assumes in Romans the moral order of the

world as unbroken either (1) by sin, or (2) by redemption. The pagan temper, I suppose, is disbelief of a moral order. I think it is breaking out again—witness Hardy.

SMEDLEY'S HYDROPATHIC ESTABLISHMENT,
MATLOCK, *Aug.* 7, 1894.

I meant to write you a long letter before I left home about the Bible chapter,[1] but could not find the necessary time and energy. So far as it goes, I agree with it—but I think its tone is hesitating as compared with the other lectures, and it is not clear like them. Writing from memory I cannot put criticisms properly, but will venture a few rough suggestions.

1. It is a great omission to ignore, as I think you do, Christ's attitude to the Old Testament. That is, in the estimate of 99 Christians out of 100, the primary fact. It is their first ground for revering the Old Testament, and it is sufficient. You must also note that the only *respectable* defenders of verbal inspiration — the Princeton school of Green and Warfield—rest their whole case upon this. Undoubtedly the argument has a certain plausibility ; yet it can easily be shown that they are mistaken. But it cannot be shown that Christ did not claim all for the Old Testament that any Christian soul needs —that with it He fought Satan and death—that in it He saw a true picture of God and a true history of the way in which He led His people like a flock.

I am persuaded that the ordinary person thinks omission of this subject disingenuous. On the lowest view of Christ, His appreciation of the Old Testament is a signal fact.

2. Do you sufficiently recognize the idea involved in the term Canon—that in the Bible there is told of God *all* that mortals can know ? That is, there is no supplement to revelation. As this is a fact

[1] The chapter entitled 'Holy Scripture' in Denney's 'Studies in Theology.' These lectures had been delivered in Chicago Theological Seminary, during April 1894.

which can easily be tested, I think it impresses most minds. Thus, much of the New Testament (Hebrews, Revelation) is taken up with the history of the world beyond death. What dreams, what fancies have ever added a line or word to such history? And how surely and grandly it is told.

3. Do you make enough of the facts that come under ' the singular care and providence of God ' ? For example :

(*a*) The plain man sees in a moment that no biographer of Christ could have kept from blurring and staining the Image unless divinely guided. I think the literary man must say the same. What then ? We cannot say how the supernatural mixed with the natural. But can we say so positively as you do that there was no historical guidance ? Can we say that the Biblical historian had no materials save those of the secular historian ? I doubt it. Was he not guided in his choice of materials ? Was he not guided in shunning the false and the useless ? If the substance of *all* Scripture is the Word of God, can we lay down so decidedly the action of the Eternal Spirit ? I do not think so. It must remain a mystery.

(*b*) Do you lay enough stress on the self-evidencing nature of much—say, the Gospel of John ? I distinguish between *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* and this witness. The critics may argue for ever about the authorship of John, but the ordinary man knows that if the discourses in John are not the work of Jesus—then a greater than Jesus is here.

4. Again, I would like some recognition of the future of the Bible—as sketched by Trench in his *Hulsean Lectures*. People are tired of being told that they must give up this, that, and the other thing. They should know that all true criticism is preparing the Bible for a renewed reign.

You see what I am driving at in these clumsy and compressed remarks. It is that you should take account of the arguments and thoughts about the Bible that are moving in average minds. In any

case I feel sure you cannot simply ignore the attitude of Christ to the Old Testament. If we could put people just there, all would be right—at that standpoint of freedom and fearlessness and yet reverence and love and trust, the difficulty would be over. Is it hopeless?

GRAND HÔTEL ST. JAMES, PARIS, *Nov.* 3, 1894.

I have never used any of my 'preached words' in the *B.W.*, but have written the things as articles. I have about 500 sermons written out: but I don't suppose I shall ever make any use of them. Somehow, one seems to leave them behind.

I wish you would say whether you agree with what I say this week [1] about 'regenerate depravity.' I have been reading a lot of William Law, with the feeling that the whole thing is 'another gospel.' People say St. Francis called himself a dog; Bunyan, a worm, etc. Therefore they should much more, and then they are dejected because they are not dejected. But I don't see anything of that kind in the Epistles. When St. Paul said he was the chief of sinners I suppose he was thinking of his unregenerate life. He surely never would have said that he at the time of writing was the chief of sinners—would he?

*To Professor Peake.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, *Feb.* 4, 1898.

I read with the greatest care and benefit your extremely able criticisms in the *Quarterly*.[2] I do not know anything so good, so stimulating, so full of knowledge and thought. Having said this, I hope you will not think me too presumptuous in going on to say more. It always impresses me that with you *every* question is open. Now I cannot think that they should be so. Some questions are closed, else how can we be set for the defence of the Gospel?

[1] In his leading article on 'The Lost Grace of Godly Sorrow,' in the *British Weekly* of November 1, 1894.

[2] The *Primitive Methodist Quarterly* (now the *Holborn Review*), of which Professor Peake was, and is, editor.

We are not set for the provisional acceptance of certain views and the candid consideration of everything urged against them. I see many things that more or less disquiet me. For example, I was greatly struck by an article in the *Mansfield College Magazine* which was written by a man whom I do not know. It was on the ordinary line of latter-day Unitarianism, but what struck me specially was that it was given the first place in the periodical, and that the writer evidently assumed that the men he was writing to were of his own mind although they were too cowardly to tell the truth to their congregations. As I suppose the writer has good means of knowing the Mansfield men his testimony must carry weight, though I am aware that some of them are of a different mind. I intended to publish the article with comments in the *British Weekly*, but thought it well to write to Dr. Fairbairn first, as I was afraid it might injure Mansfield. Dr. Fairbairn sent me a very unsatisfactory and very nearly discourteous reply. I have not made up my mind what I shall do.

Again, I went lately to a meeting of your students in Whitechapel and made a little address. I noticed particularly the opening prayer, delivered by a comparatively young minister whose name I do not recollect. It was rather in the George MacDonald style, with some expressions out of 'David Elginbrod,' but it was curious to see that he never prayed for the conversion of souls. He made no allusion to the death of Christ or to the work of the Holy Spirit, in fact it was a prayer which a Unitarian might have offered. You may say that this is a small thing and that we all of us do the same thing at times. Certainly; but one puts one thing along with another. I feel very deeply that if Primitive Methodists lose their evangelistic power they will lose their savour. You cannot in the circumstances make them great scholars or great literary men, whatever you do.

I am also extremely impressed by the heathenish manner in which certain Nonconformist 'Settle-

ments ' are carried on. There is, it is true, a certain pretence of Christian teaching, but what is taught is not Christianity. No heart is thrown into it and no interest is taken. On the other hand, people are got through socialism, waxworks, magic lanterns, and the like. But it is not in this way that our Churches have lived or can possibly live. Forgive me bothering you with this, but you have a great trust committed to you. The moulding of the Primitive Methodists will be much in your hands, and I want you to think it over. It is not that I am opposed to people getting educated and reading books : far from it. But the value of all that is being enormously exaggerated. I feel I would much rather have the superstitions of the Roman Catholic Church than a great deal that passes for enlightened teaching amongst us. It beats me to think how people can congratulate themselves that a few Roman Catholic priests have turned from their own Church to Sabatier. You would not believe what hosts of letters I get, and do not print, about the kind of thing that is preached in many of our chapels just now, especially by the younger men.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, *July* 29, 1898.

You asked me for a book about the Church. I have a very excellent book chalked out and partly written, but you threw cold water on it and killed it, an act which will undoubtedly cause you great remorse sooner or later. What I found most useful was Walker's book on Scottish Theology, with the references. It is quite a wonderful book, and it is strange that it is comparatively so little known. It is worth all the writings of Bruce and——but we must not be profane.

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, *Nov.* 2, 1898.

As regards the Lord's Supper I thought I was stating the ordinary doctrine of the Reformed

Churches, and a letter from Lindsay which I publish this week [in the *British Weekly*], and also a lecture by Rainy which is practically coincident with mine, seem to show that I did. . . . I confess, however, that there was something at the back of my mind for which I do not exactly know how to find expression. You might call it materialism, but the word is very misleading. I should prefer to call it corporeity. Maclaren, who sometimes says profound things, said once, 'Corporeity is the end of God's ways with man,' and that is, I think, true. I find that Congregationalists like Horton and Horne have practically swept away in their minds the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, and substituted what they call the resurrection of the spirit.

Now I am certain the Apostles were of quite different mind. They believed that what was laid in Joseph's grave was changed, and did not remain any longer in any form upon the earth. The only words they could find for it are unintelligible to us, a heavenly and a spiritual body ; but they indicate a reality to which we must cling though we do not understand it, and the mystery of the mystical union and of the Lord's Supper seems to me to be there. Our present life and our future life are not wholly spiritual, and though there is a material element which will pass away, something will remain which is beyond our understanding but which corresponds to matter rather than to spirit. We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. You are wrong, I think, in saying there is no mystery in the matter. There is a great deal. We do not know how the corporeal element which has persisted through death in Christ communicates and is nourished. The ferocity of the instinct by which the Church Catholic has fixed on a deeper view of the Lord's Supper is in itself very noteworthy. Theology has lost by the precision of its definitions, by not recognizing that all theological truth is fringed with mystery. I should be very sorry for you to make up your mind too soon to a poor view of the Sacraments.

What, it seems to me, we must hold is that they are exempted at no point from the law of moral action, but beyond that I do not think we can go. Do you see in the least what I am driving at? Have you read Dale's essay on the Lord's Supper in 'Ecclesia'? If not, I should like you very much to do so and tell me what you think.

Dr. Denney replied in a latter dated Glasgow, November 12, 1898, in which he wrote: 'I agree with all you say about the Resurrection and the Lord's body, but I do not see that that has really anything to do with the Supper. I do not deny that there is mystery in the presence of Christ; what I objected to in Calvin, as in Luther and the Romanists, was that they made an artificial and superfluous mystery out of their own heads—a mystery at a point where no mystery should be; and this still seems to me to be the case.' [1]

*To Dr. James Denney.*

27 Paternoster Row, London *Nov.* 18, 1898.

I do not see that we can put any meaning into the words even of the Shorter Catechism unless we affirm that Christ is spiritually present in the Bread and Wine, which is all that is meant by the Reformation doctrine so far as I understand it. I do not see any parallel in what you say about Baptism. If we had chapters about Baptism such as we have about the Lord's Supper, the case of course would be altered, and with due deference I do think that the subject of the mystical union has an important bearing on the subject. Of that union the Lord's Supper is a symbol, and we know that the union is neither simply moral nor simply spiritual, but that it is in a sense corporeal. Further, the Sacrament ministers not only to a spiritual life, but to a life that transcends words, though it does not wholly transcend thought. You will find that those who hold a low view of the

[1] See 'Letters of Principal Denney,' pp. 12, 13.

Lord's Supper have no belief whatever in resurrection or in the glorified body of Christ.

27 Paternoster Row, *June* 13, 1900.

The strange thing to me about Wesley is his apostolic aloofness. He was interested in everything and yet quite detached. I am certain that nobody has studied Wesley as he ought to be studied, and the Methodist biographies are as dense and blind as possible. . . . It is so very difficult to feel that the fashion of this world passeth away, and yet at the same time to do one's utmost in it and to care for everything. To combine detachment with love seems an almost impossible task, and yet Wesley accomplished it. I like Pauline men better, for my part, but he was an apostle. I am very glad that you agree with me as to [William] Law. It shows the most extraordinary superficiality to treat the dispute between Law and Wesley as a mere personal quarrel. It involved the whole conception of Christianity.

27 Paternoster Row, London, *Jan.* 5, 1901.

I was glad to read what you say about Mansel. The fact is, people who have never read him treat him as a bogey man. I never conversed with anybody who had carefully read his 'Bampton Lectures' and his articles in the *Contemporary Review*. The Lectures, as you know, are a fine piece of writing as well as of thinking, and anything more complete than Maurice's misunderstanding of them I never read; in fact, it almost destroyed my respect for Maurice.

27 Paternoster Row, London, *Feb.* 14, 1901.

Thank you very much for the notice of Moffatt, which I have printed as a leading article.[1] I must tell you frankly that I am not altogether pleased with it, and I will try to tell you why. I look upon

[1] This article by Dr. Denney appeared in the *British Weekly* for February 21, 1901.

Moffatt's book [' The Historical New Testament '] as a landmark, not for anything in it that is important or new, but because he first among the Presbyterians of our Church calmly yields the crucial points on the New Testament, and makes the admissions as if they were of no consequence. A student like Moffatt goes on quietly yielding this and that, and does not see what his admissions mean for the working Church. But he needs, and others need, to be told it. Men ought to know what is at stake in these controversies. You cannot but see that you have a very special responsibility, partly arising from your official position, and partly from your personal qualities. I have thought recently that you were more inclined to give way to the current of criticism than formerly, to adopt a position like Bruce, but in this I may be mistaken. Bruce I have no doubt went further latterly than anything he published, and his article [on ' Jesus '] in the ' Encyclopaedia Biblica '[1] clearly shows to my mind that he had abandoned the contention that Jesus was sinless. Christ he believed to have been a very good fellow, almost as good as Sandy Bruce, though less enlightened. But did he go any further than that? As for Schmiedel, he would base a Life of Christ on the facts, as he would call them, (1) that Christ was a fanatic, (2) that He was accused by His conscience, (3) that He had moods of despair, thinking Himself abandoned, and deservedly abandoned, by God. Now, if you professors think that Christianity or the Church will survive in any form after these admissions, you are entirely mistaken. The Old Testament business is different. It is not such plain sailing as Smith[2] would make it, but in the end of the day it will come right. It is different with the New Testament. The historical Jesus Christ is the article of a standing or falling Christianity.

[1] Edited by J. S. Black and T. K. Cheyne : London, 1899-1903.

[2] A leading article, signed W. R. N., praising Professor George Adam Smith's Yale Lectures on 'Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament,' appeared in the *British Weekly* on the same day that this letter was written.

I see more and more that I shall never get a chance of doing myself justice unless the Church institutes a lectureship for theological professors and appoints me to fill it, the professors to be compelled to attend regularly and to pass an examination at the close.

27 Paternoster Row, London, *Feb.* 20, 1901.

I trust you are incubating something about Schmiedel.[1] I shall be very much surprised if you do not see that we are come to a real crisis when Christian scholars edit and write a book where the Divinity and even the sinlessness of Christ are almost denied. There are hundreds of thousands of the laity who know what that means, and if they believe it they will discard, and properly discard, everything in the nature of Christianity. I cannot help feeling that the men who should speak at such a time are men in positions like yourself. It ought not to be left to an ordinary journalist.

27 Paternoster Row, London, *Feb.* 24, 1901.

I think I agree with what you say about the Gospels and the Apostolic teaching, but what appears to me of cardinal importance is the fact of the sinlessness of Christ. If the Gospels give us that, and I think they do, they lay the foundation of the whole structure. If that is taken away, everything goes to pieces at once. Words have no meaning if Schmiedel does not deny the sinlessness of Christ, and certainly Bruce goes a long way in that direction. If they are right, then the blind has indeed led the blind, with the inevitable result. It is upon this point, as it seems to me, that the controversy must turn. I do not agree in considering the authorship of the Fourth Gospel a small matter. If the Johannine authorship goes, it will be very difficult to accept almost any part of the book as historical. The surrender of the historicity of the Acts of the Apostles also means a

[1] Professor Schmiedel of Leyden, author of the article 'Gospels' in the 'Encyclopaedia Biblica.'

great deal, though it means less. . . . What will really be important and a tremendous step in the history of our Church will be the concession of the right to hold and teach such opinions in her communion. I am sure that when the people get to understand what is involved in the critical view of the New Testament they will be deeply moved, some to complete rejection of Christianity, and many to a fierce unreasoning bigotry.

I am glad to see that the real significance of these matters is being apprehended. I quote in the *British Weekly* this week an extract from an able article in the *Academy*, and also from Fairbairn's review in the *Speaker*. Fairbairn is evidently perturbed, and no wonder. I do not look upon the action of Cheyne and Black [1] as either courageous or despairing. Both of them, I believe, wish to get the Church out of the way altogether, and leave the Bible free for study as an interesting relic, most of it requiring to be rewritten. You may rely upon it that you will have to take a serious and important part in controversies not far ahead, controversies far more grave, in my opinion, than those raised over the Old Testament.

When vol. iii. of the 'Encyclopaedia Biblica' appeared, Nicoll reviewed it in the *British Weekly* of April 24, 1902, in an article entitled 'The Bible in Tatters.'

*From Dr. James Denney.*

21 Lynedoch Street, Glasgow, *Sept.* 5, 1901.

The opinions of men like Maclaren and Dale on Westcott's Commentaries are very astonishing to me. He was a man of learning of the highest order, but I venture to think that as an interpreter his place is by no means among the first. He had an extraordinary faculty for putting the simple things in the New

[1] Editors of the 'Encyclopaedia Biblica.'

Testament into vague and solemn polysyllables, and he seems to have imagined that in this way he was generalising from them and attaining profound philosophical truths. The worst of this kind of thing is that it is infectious, and Westcott had a good many disciples who learned little more from him than to translate ' It is not good for man to be alone ' into ' Individuality is consummated in fellowship.' This was actually done—*and printed.* But his book on the Canon is a splendid book, far the best there is on the subject; and I suppose his share in the Greek Testament must have been equal to Hort's, though Hort did the writing in it.

*From Dr. James Denney.*

21 LYNEDOCH STREET, GLASGOW, *May* 27, 1902.

Fairbairn's book [' The Philosophy of the Christian Religion '] is far the best, I think, that he has written, though it might easily have been put into half the space. There is a great deal of verbosity and of repetition, and it seems impossible for him to be simple and concise; but all demerits are outweighed by the abundance that is in it, and I am sure it will do a world of good. It is fine to see a man who, after Kant and Ritschl, is still not afraid to *think* about the Christian religion.

A laudatory leading article on Dr. Fairbairn's book, signed by Dr. Denney, appeared in the *British Weekly* of June 12, 1902.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, *Nov.* 21, 1903.

I have been very much interested in your book ' The Atonement and the Modern Mind.' I did not feel myself qualified to review it, and so I sent it to Dods, and we will see what he makes of it [in the *British Weekly*]. My feeling is that, while your book is very valuable as a transition, it does not deal with

the main point. The modern mind is concerned with the ideas of science and philosophy, not as they occur in the original sources, but as they get into imaginative literature, poetry, fiction, and even the popular essay. The great pioneers in science and philosophy often apprehend very little the bearings of their conclusions, but the imaginative mind takes them up in whole or in part and turns them into current coin. Thus Oliver Wendell Holmes took up Darwin's conclusions, as showing that the area of responsibility is far more contracted than the theologians imagined it, and in all his books he never ceased to hammer upon this thesis. No doubt the popular effect was very great. I should like to write some time a series of articles and make them into a book, calling it 'The Atonement and Modern Literature.' I would deal with the imaginative writers. Thus, for example, in considering the idea of sin, it would perhaps be true to say on the whole that the modern mind as expressed in modern literature recognises clearly only two sins, cruelty and treachery. The bearings of this are very obvious, and I can never sufficiently admire the penetration of Voltaire in singling out chastity as the main point in the ethical teaching of Christianity. But before writing those articles I ought to do a good deal of reading and re-reading, and this I am able to accomplish only very slowly. I cannot profess to have any real knowledge of science—which is a great misfortune, but cannot be remedied at this time of the day.

You do not seem to me to give anything like sufficient importance to the place which the union with Christ occupies in the Pauline writings. To interpret this as meaning a moral union is surely to clip and sweat the spiritual coinage. . . . The whole question of immortality and the attitude of the modern mind thereto needs to be very seriously considered in connexion with the Atonement, and I do not know anybody who has fairly faced it.

In Dr. Denney's reply, dated November 28, 1903, he wrote : [1]

> When a man maintains that there is something which may be described as a ' mystical union,' which transcends a moral union, all I can say is that my mind does not follow him. . . . Much of what appears (in St. Paul) to favour the idea of a mystical as going beyond a moral union is the language of passion, which has a poetic and emotional truth—a kind of truth which is necessary to religion—but which *loses* its truth the moment it is turned into prose. It is just like the language of passion in which the sacramental bread and wine are called the body and blood of Christ. No other language would satisfy Christian feeling. Yet they are *not* the body and blood of Christ, and a great deal that is written about the mystical union seems to me as unreal as transubstantiation.

*To Professor H. R. Mackintosh.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *March* 12, 1908.

I am sending you a copy of the ' Lamp of Sacrifice,' in which you will find a chapter on the mystical union. I first studied the subject in Principal Edwards' Commentary on 1 Corinthians. It is all there. Polwhele is good, but I know very little else that is good. Of course there is Bishop Hall's ' Christ Mystical,' which is right enough as far as it goes. But Edwards is the best.

What Maclaren and many other writers contemplate is a union of soul with soul. That is not what is meant by St. Paul. He means a union of the man with the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ. After this all the deeper writers have felt, and our own Shorter Catechism shows it ; but even a really profound mystical writer like Spurgeon comes much short of the facts.

In 1906 the January number of the *Expositor* began a new series, and Nicoll took the opportunity to con-

[1] See ' Letters of Principal Denney,' pp. 35-38.

tribute a brief but significant preface. He had occupied the editorial chair for twenty-one years, and in the long and splendid list of contributors to his magazine he mentioned with special affection and gratitude among the dead—Lightfoot, Westcott, Godet, A. B. Davidson, Milligan, and Henry Drummond. He went on to say that in 1885, when he became editor, it was plain to him that much space would have to be devoted to the Higher Criticism of Scripture, and proceeded to define the present situation. 'There are still a few eminent scholars who decline to accept the newer theories, but hardly one whose opinions have not been much modified. Practically the critical view of the Old Testament is taught from every Hebrew chair in this country.' He added that a new chapter in the history of Old Testament criticism had, however, been opened by the publication of the 'Encyclopaedia Biblica.'

'In 1885, British scholars were resting securely in a conservative view of the New Testament. This view was fortified by the great Cambridge trio, Westcott, Lightfoot, and Hort. Their vast learning and authority overawed opposition, and there was very little on the other side that could be called weighty or scholarly. But now it is contended that the principles applying to the Old Testament must also be allowed to operate on the New Testament record. The Johannine problem has passed through various phases, the last perhaps more favourable to the old view than that which preceded it. It requires no great foresight to see that the controversy ahead of us will be concerned with the documents that make up the New Testament. The attention that has long been claimed for the Old Testament is rapidly being transferred to the New.'

Nicoll went on to declare that he viewed the situation without alarm. 'There is no reason to fear for the Bible or for Christianity.' 'The living interest in the Bible steadily grows. . . . There never perhaps was a more extended appreciation of the moral power and spiritual value of Christianity. There never was a greater yearning after its succours. For Christianity

no substitute, ethical or other, has been discovered. It is in sole possession as the one credible and effective religion of the world.' . . . 'If there is one lesson which my experience has taught me it is the supreme importance for the Church of theological learning. No Church is wise which does not recognize the necessity of setting its best men apart for study and for teaching, and of trusting and supporting them generously.'

From what follows it will be seen how frankly Nicoll accepted the main conclusions which Hebrew scholars have reached in regard to the structure of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the Bible remained for him more than ever the living record of those great redeeming and revealing acts of God which *are* the Gospel. And it was true of him—what he wrote of R. H. Hutton—that he had no sympathy with those who distil a residuum of meaning from the Bible and pretend that this is what was intended by the sacred writers. He abhorred the bleached paraphrases which certain Broad Churchmen make of the most profound and passionate words of Scripture.

*To Professor Peake.*

WARWICK SQUARE, E.C., *April* 17 [1907].

I do not think there is any serious difference between us. I am convinced of the truth of the analysis of the Pentateuch by the converging lines of evidence. It might not be easy to establish it on one line, but the lines converge in an extraordinary manner. I am also nearly convinced that Wellhausen is right in his arrangement, though I easily perceive difficulties. Of course I am not speaking from the standpoint of an expert. I have only a moderate knowledge of Hebrew and no knowledge of any other Oriental language, but I have followed the controversy more or less closely through many years.

When I visited Wellhausen at Greifswald shortly after the publication of his 'History of Israel,' we

spoke much of the objections taken to his theory. I ventured to ask him what he thought the most formidable objection. To this he replied 'Interpolations.' He explained, if I understood him rightly, that in order to carry a theory through, the critic was strongly tempted to postulate interpolations in passages that seemed to go against him, when there was no other evidence of interpolation than that the passage was contrary to the theory.

As to the general question of the value of internal evidence in questions of disputed authorship, I think it much wants a careful and scientific examination. You do not quite understand my position about Besant and Rice.[1] I shall try to make it clearer. What I meant was this. The critic has before him, let us say, three out of five factors. He decides on the evidence he has. Competent critics may practically come to a conclusion based on that evidence. But then there are factors outside of their knowledge, and it may very well be that when these factors emerge into view the whole conclusion may be overturned. I have a particular interest in the matter because Sir Walter Besant lived opposite me until he died, and I saw him frequently. He was reticent about Rice, but I do not think I am breaking confidence when I say that he told me about one novel—which I am not at liberty to name—that the whole plot was supplied by Rice and all the writing was supplied by him. All that Rice did in the way of writing was to make considerable additions to the proofs. Now if one knew that fact in analysing the book everything would be changed. Also I happen to know the real facts as to the dual authorship of Stevenson's 'In the Wrong Box' and 'The Dynamiter.' I have seen the manuscript of 'In the Wrong Box,' and it completely overthrows the conclusions which most critics came to. More surprising is 'The Dynamiter.' I had supposed, and everybody else had supposed, that Mrs. Stevenson's name was associated with the book out of courtesy.

[1] The two friends who collaborated in a number of popular novels.

On the contrary, she wrote most of it. It turned out that she had an admirable talent for imitating her husband's style in its strongest peculiarities, so that what she wrote is more Stevensonian than Stevenson. This shows the need of caution. I have read a very great deal about the Shakespeare controversies, and if any one had time it would be quite worth while to write an essay about them. What I am trying to make out is that there may be a concensus of critics, and a rightful concensus of critics, given certain materials for judgment, but that until the materials are complete it may very well turn out that the critics are all wrong, not because they are dishonest or stupid, but because the case is not fully before them.

This will not go very far in answering the case about the Pentateuch, but I feel sure it would throw into doubt a great many confident conclusions as to other parts of Scripture. For example, I have been reading lately in the evening Professor Briggs' Commentary on the Psalms. There is a great deal in it which I am sure a sound knowledge of literature and its phenomena would class as doubtful in the highest degree, if not positively wrong.

WARWICK SQUARE, E.C., *April* 20, 1907.

I have been reading Walter Raleigh's new book on Shakespeare.[1] It is not quite a success, I think, but one thing in it pleased me very much. For many years, in season and out of season, wherever I could get an article in, I have maintained that all the attempts to solve the problem of Shakespeare's Sonnets have completely broken down, and that the reason is that Shakespeare himself did not mean that people should read his story. He flung the key away. I also have argued that the Sonnets are undoubtedly expressions of intense personal feeling, and not exercises written in a current style. Raleigh adopts all this, except that he does not say distinctly that

[1] In Macmillan's 'English Men of Letters.'

Shakespeare was deliberately blotting out tracks and confusing his readers, as I have no doubt he was. Considering what was written so dogmatically by Sidney Lee and others, I am pleased with Raleigh's position. Much of the Shakespeare inquiry is what Matthew Arnold called the foiled searching of mortality, and I feel pretty sure that in the end people will come to similar conclusions on such questions as the composition of the Gospels and the Apocalypse, though it is very well that men should do their best till they are convinced that a solution is hopeless.

On this subject it seems right to add that Nicoll persistently maintained that those who have studied the analogous problems presented in English literature will be the first to hesitate as to the legitimacy and validity of the methods adopted by many New Testament critics. He never substantially departed from the position which he defined as follows in the Introduction to his volume 'The Church's One Foundation,' published in 1901 :

'In dealing with analysis as applied to the Gospels, we are entitled to ask for the principles on which the so-called historical and literary criticism is carried on. For our part, we have the deepest conviction that until the principles of criticism are established by an induction based on the phenomena of literature generally, little that is solid or certain can be established. It is past dispute that English criticism is unable, as a rule, to assign authorship to an anonymous contemporary book. It is unable, as a rule, to distinguish between the work of two collaborators. It is unable, in short, to perform any of these achievements which are believed possible when the Scriptures are handled. We are convinced, further, that the whole history of English literature will show that English criticism was always just as powerless as it is now. There may be probabilities ; but, as a rule, the likely explanation is not the true explanation. In other words, the answer to much sceptical criticism is to be found in showing,

by a catena of instances, that criticism is attempting a task of which it is fundamentally incapable. Christians are also entitled to ask for more agreement between critics of the Gospel history than has yet been reached. In the face of the differences that divide the extreme critics, one may well doubt whether the problem of the composition of the Gospels is soluble. One may be perfectly certain that it has not been solved.'

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*Dec.* 4, 1908.

I have just completed the first hasty reading of your great book [' Jesus and the Gospel ']. It seems to me in the main a most powerful, convincing and timely argument. On Sunday I shall read it again with more serious care, as at present some points are obscure to me.

I will tell you what struck me. I kept on reading in search of an unequivocal statement that Jesus is God. Very likely I have missed it, but I did not find it. There are Trinitarians, Binitarians, Arians, and Unitarians. You repudiate Arianism and Unitarianism, but I have the impression that you would not repudiate Binitarianism. In the great days of the *Spectator*, when Hutton and Townsend were running it, Townsend used to say that he was an Arian, the last of the Arians, and that Hutton was a Binitarian, the first of the Binitarians. It is quite truet hat Hutton was a Binitarian, as Henry Sidgwick pointed out, but I fancy there are more Binitarians.

Then I do not clearly see, under the discussion on Creed, whether you were proposing a formula for office-bearers and members, or for office-bearers only, or for members only.

However these things may be, the main part of the argument is as good and strong as it could be, and will greatly help to settle many perplexed minds. The style is exactly suitable to the subject.

Some sentences ought to be quoted from Dr. Denney's reply to this letter. He wrote [1] from Glasgow on December 7, 1908 :

> Your letter was very reassuring and grateful to me, and I am happy to think that the argument of my book as a whole commands your consent. . . . As for your remark that you missed an unequivocal statement that Jesus is God, I feel inclined to say that such a statement seems unattractive to me just because it is impossible to make it unequivocal. It is not the true way to say a true thing. I think I have made it plain that for me to worship Jesus as God is worshipped, to trust Him as God is trusted, to owe to Him what we can owe to God alone, is the essence of Christianity. I have said in so many words that no one means what a Christian means by God, unless he includes in that all that a Christian means by 'Father, Son, and Spirit.' This I hold to be the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity, but I dread ways of putting it which do nothing but challenge contradiction. 'Jesus is God' seems to me one of those provocative ways, and therefore I avoid it. It has the same objectionableness in my mind as calling Mary the Mother of God.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*Dec.* 8, 1908.

I should like to ask you whether you have read the history of Arianism in England. I read it up pretty fully a long time ago. There is a meagre and not very accurate account of it in Dorner. Briefly, there was a powerful section led by Watts and Doddridge in the 18th century. They endeavoured to find a middle term between Trinitarianism and Arianism. Isaac Watts had a theory which is correctly described in Dorner. But I have read a posthumous book of his in the British Museum which goes further than that, and Lardner, a very fair-minded and scholarly man, declares that Watts became before

[1] See 'Letters of Principal Denney,' pp. 120-121.

his death completely Unitarian. As for Doddridge, he was virtually, I think, an Arian. At least, he recognized the Arians as brothers, though he admitted some modifications. Principal Gordon, who is biassed but well informed, says that the majority of Doddridge's students became Arians, and he is rather disposed to think that Doddridge himself was. If you have Watts and Doddridge, they are worth looking at.

In any case, the Arians at that time would, I think, have gone as far as you do now—at least some of them would. This is true also about the original Arians of New England ; but the point to be noted is that Arianism was found to be untenable, and the successors of the Arians were almost always Unitarians. Even as Unitarians they contended for a long time for the miracles, and especially for the resurrection of Christ. But that view is not represented now. For my part, I should still think it correct to say that Jesus claimed to be God and that He was God.

I observe that in a recent publication on the lives of celebrated Unitarians, Watts and Doddridge are both included.

One thing is quite clear, and that is the steady decay of all the Unitarian and Arian congregations. In no case was it found possible to maintain them, so far as I know, even though popular preachers occasionally had crowds for a few years. Religion died under their teaching. If you will look at Stanford's Life of Doddridge you will see how unhappy he was at the decay in his own congregation and how he exercised himself about it. There were many more communicants when he began his ministry than when he ended it. . . .

I should not like to discuss this question in the *British Weekly*. But I hope Dr. Fairgrieve's formula, 'I believe that He is not only the Son of God but God the Son,' and the exclamation, 'My Lord and my God,' would not seem objectionable to you. I can see that there is much room for discussion of the

Person of Christ, but I do from my heart believe that God was manifest in the flesh.

It seems right to add the following sentences from Dr. Denney's reply,[1] dated December 12, 1908:

I really do not think there is any difference between us. When you say that you do from your heart believe that God was manifest in the flesh, I am sure I can say the same. I have missed the mark completely in what I have written if I have not made it clear that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Probably the aversion I have to such an expression as 'Jesus is God' is linguistic as much as theological. We are so thoroughly monotheistic now, that the word God, to put it pedantically, has ceased to be an appellative and become a proper noun: it *identifies* the being to whom it is applied so that it can be used as the subject of a sentence; but it does not unfold the nature of that being so that it could be used as the predicate in a sentence. In Greek, and in the first century, it was quite different. You could say then ὁ Ἰησοῦς θεός ἐστιν. . . . It is because God is to all intents a proper noun with us, which, if it is used as a predicate at all, must make an equation with the subject (Jesus is God being the same thing as Jesus = God), that it seems not only to me, but I am sure to most people, an unnatural way of declaring their faith in Christ as Immanuel—God with us. Jesus is man as well as God, in some way therefore both less and more than God; and consequently a form of proposition which in our idiom suggests inevitably the precise equivalence of Jesus and God does some kind of injustice to the truth.

*To Professor H. R. Mackintosh.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, *Dec.* 11, 1908.

With regard to Denney's book ['Jesus and the Gospel'] I am somewhat puzzled. The constructive part of the book seems to me to be done almost

[1] 'Letters of Principal Denney,' pp. 123-125.

as well as it could be done on the lines and within the limits he has chosen. But I am wholly against him, so far as I can see, in the other part. He appears to have embarked on the perilous and fateful task of finding a mean between Trinitarianism and Arianism. . . .

I wrote to Denney and said that I had kept on looking at his book for a clear assertion that Jesus is God. He replies that he would not think that a New Testament thought, that God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. He also objects to the statement that Jesus claimed to be God. I was in Manchester the other day, and spent the forenoon with old Dr. Maclaren, who has a keener insight into the New Testament than any one else I know. Maclaren at once declared that both my expressions—Jesus is God, and Jesus claimed to be God—were entirely a New Testament thought, and furthermore said that if they were departed from 'you may chuck up the whole thing at once.' He also entirely agreed with me that Denney's formula is a formula for the admission of Arians and Unitarians. All Arians would sign it gladly, and sign much more. Maclaren, who knew James Martineau very intimately, said that James Martineau would have jumped to sign it. Well, then, I am clear in my own mind that I do not wish to belong to a Church which contains Arians and Unitarians in its ministry, and I know quite well what the end of such a Church would be, for all history points it out. I have written again to Denney, but I am in perplexity about the book.

There is a singular vein of scepticism in him, for all his apparent orthodoxy. For instance, he does not believe in the existence of the devil and of evil spirits. Nor does he believe in the Second Advent. . . . I should like very much if you would tell me soon how the thing strikes you.

Nicoll wrote a series of discriminating articles on 'Jesus and the Gospel' in the *British Weekly* of

January 7, January 14, and January 21, 1909. On reading the first of these, Dr. Denney wrote: 'I cannot thank you enough for your far too generous appreciation of my book.' The final paragraph of the article published on January 21 contains the following sentence: 'In the last section of the book, where Dr. Denney applies his conclusions to a consideration of creeds and other subjects, we find much to question.'

*To Dr. James Denney.*

[In the *British Weekly* of December 14, 1911, Nicoll had written a leader on 'Immortality in the Light of the Cross,' which Dr. Denney endorsed. See 'Letters of Principal Denney,' pp. 189-190.]

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, E.C., *Dec.* 27, 1911.

As to Christ's conception of immortality—there is a vagueness in the word. Dale and Edward White admitted survival. Their theory, as I understand it, was that we all survived, and that the wicked were tormented for a certain period and then annihilated. I do not think that is a view for which any serious person will stand up in the future, though nobody can say that it is impossible for God to annihilate a soul. However, these men recognize the obvious fact that Christ sees in the future energetic beings blessed or cursed. The thought of their not existing in the future seems never to have crossed His mind. On any theory of His Person this has extraordinary significance, but I have no definite eschatology beyond the things I have said. There are passages that seem to look towards an ultimate unity, however it may be attained.

If Christ were to come now and preach a Gospel of immortality, while acknowledging that there was nothing to fear in death save extinction, I doubt if He would appeal to every one. I remember Moncure Conway's wife saying when she was sixty-five: 'Sixty-five is a good age, and my children are all out, and all my work is finished, and I should like to fall asleep and never to wake again.' When one is

exhausted by grief or pain, night and sleep are darkling doors of hope. There is a kind of spiritual fatigue among many people now which makes the thought of extinction not unwelcome. I do not think there are many people who would say now, as W. E. Forster said : 'I had rather be damned than annihilated.'

I think in your lecture you make too little of reunion as a factor in the faith of immortality. Reunion, after all, is the old reason for spiritualism ; and spiritualism, much as I dislike it, has been a great movement. I was surprised in turning over some old books the other day to find that Richard Whately was a keen spiritualist. There is no book more wanted than a really Christian and liberal book on the whole subject of reunion. I mean the desire for it, and the extent to which Christianity satisfies that desire. The popular books written on the subject are horribly mean and vulgar so far as I know them, but they have almost always found an audience.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

*March* 28, 1913.

I am very glad you are interested in the Mark Rutherford [1] articles. I do not think myself he is hostile to a true Evangelicalism. His great love and reverence for Bunyan are a proof of this. But Evangelicalism in his part of England was at one time deeply tainted by Antinomianism, following the lead of that clever scoundrel William Huntington. Many declared that as Christians and as elect they were free from obligation to the moral law and might do as they pleased. I have investigated this subject rather carefully, and could tell you many astonishing things. We had nothing quite like it in Scotland. I remember Spurgeon telling me that this was the great difficulty of his early ministry,

[1] Early in that year 'Claudius Clear' had published in the *British Weekly* a series of five articles entitled 'Memories of Mark Rutherford.' These appear in 'A Bookman's Letters,' and have since been reprinted with additions in a separate volume.

and in his sermons I see pretty frequent references to the fact. When Hale White was living in London he generally attended Spurgeon's ministry. This was about the time that Ruskin was a fellow-worshipper. Both Ruskin and Hale White had an immense admiration for Spurgeon, and I used to think that Hale White exaggerated his oratorical powers. I always thought him better to read than to hear. There was a certain monotony in his beautiful voice.

*May* 13, 1914.

Sanday has succumbed to the Modernists in a pamphlet,[1] which I am sending. He has gone on in a ridiculous way for a long time, and I think that Knox's satire [2] on him was fully justified. I should like very much if you would do a leader for me. It would be very timely and very useful.

Dr. Denney's leader entitled 'Can Faith dispense with Facts?' which appeared in the *British Weekly* for May 21, dealt with the position adopted by Professor Sanday, 'who thinks he can believe things *supra naturam* but not things *contra naturam*.'

At this point it will be convenient to append some of the caustic criticisms which Nicoll passed on theological colleges and their professors.

*To Dr. James Denney.*

27 Paternoster Row, London, *Nov.* 21, 1903.

I was interested and, if you will forgive me for saying so, partly amused to hear of your proposals about theological education. I can well understand that most professors should consider them nothing

[1] 'Bishop Gore's Challenge to Criticism: a Reply to the Bishop of Oxford's Open Letter on the Basis of Anglican Fellowship,' by W. Sanday, D.D., F.B.A., Lady Margaret Professor and Canon of Christ Church. Longmans, 1914.

[2] Apparently this was Father Ronald Knox's witty pamphlet, 'Reunion all round; or, Jael's Hammer laid aside, and the Milk of Human Kindness beaten up into Butter and serv'd in a lordly Dish . . . By . . . the Authour of "Absolute and Abitofhell."' London: Sold by the Society of SS. Peter and Paul, 1914.

short of an outrage. Yet so long as our professors maintained that they needed the summer to prepare lectures for the winter, they might have been left alone ; but when they began to give lectures in America, the game was up. In the Nonconformist Colleges here things are even worse than in Scotland. Thus, in the Colleges beside me, some of the professors only lecture three days a week. It is needless to say that these efforts exhaust them very much. But apart from that, the whole system of theological education appears to me more and more irrational. In London they are trying to conform it to the Theological Degree programme of the University of London. While I hold strongly that there ought to be a good proportion of ministers with a good theological education, knowing Hebrew and Greek and so forth, I feel sure it is wasted on many. What good is Hebrew to the majority of our ministers ? Even in Presbyterian Churches they never open a Hebrew Bible from one year's end to the other. I should like to see our students taught to read English literature in its relation to theology. I should like also in this connexion to see them taught to write English, to know what English means, which only a small minority do. I am sure that all the theological training which is of the least use could be put into two years handsomely, given the proper teachers. But I will spare your feelings, which must be already harrowed to a frightful degree, and you will unite with me in the hope that subjects may turn up week after week and prevent me from writing my mind. They are suppressing Cheshunt College among the Congregationalists now, mainly on the ground that they cannot educate there for the Theological Degrees in London University. This is disgusting, but nobody ventures to speak his mind about the enormous imposture.

HAMPSTEAD [*? November* 1905].

I have known many professors in my time—some very intimately, and I am speaking quite seriously

when I say that it is the most demoralizing business in the world as carried on in Scotland. The vast holiday, the majestical temper induced by the work, the fact that no effort is needed to keep the place or attract the students, the petty cliques which form among the professors, the induced sense of superiority to ordinary industrious beings, gradually corrupt the finest and noblest natures, and I have never known a man made a professor without becoming more or less deteriorated—the deterioration by progression. Well, there was one professor I deeply venerated, but I did not know him before he became a professor.

*To Professor H. R. Mackintosh.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square,
*Jan.* 10, 1908.

In my opinion professors have no right whatever to interfere in the election of professors. There has been a great deal too much of that in our Church, and it ought to be exposed and punished at all hazards.

I have known of ministers trying to nominate their successors, with most disastrous results, and it is worse when professors try to nominate their successors. There is by no means a good feeling towards professors through the United Free Church generally, and I do not wonder, for the jobs that have been perpetrated in my knowledge have been simply scandalous.

The following letter, written in March 1909 to Professor H. R. Mackintosh, of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, gives Nicoll's judgment in retrospect on his own theological experience at Aberdeen.

My feeling about the Free Church College, Aberdeen, is the same as it has always been. I see that it does some good to the Free Church cause in the town, but at the same time I feel that the students would do much better in a more central place. I

was myself a student in Aberdeen, and in one way never regretted it, because we were a happy family and had three remarkable persons as professors. Yet I feel that we were cut off from the larger life of the Church, and that this was in many ways an immense loss to us. When I came south to Kelso I knew nobody ; and even when I did get to know men, the want of a common fellowship at College was decidedly felt. My own class-fellows—there were only six of us in the class—all of them, so far as I know, agree with me in this opinion. We could easily have managed in Edinburgh, and we would have been in many respects better men for the proper atmosphere there.

*To the Rev. Dr. J. D. Jones.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square,
*Nov.* 15, 1912.

From the day I began to think about these things up till now, I have always held that the pastorate is the highest office open to a minister. In my own Church, the Free Church of Scotland, the great ambition in my day of promising young men was to get a professorship. Over and over I have known eminently successful pastors get into theological professorships and fail. For example, my old minister, Dr. Laidlaw of Aberdeen, one of the best preachers I ever heard, made a complete and lamentable mess of the theological chair at Edinburgh. But of course the work of a professor involves no such labour as a great pastorate. In Scotland they have only five months [of work each year], including among this a fortnight's Christmas holiday. I remember my friend Dr. Stalker, who had a very large and successful church in Glasgow, accepted a professorship at Aberdeen College where there are only about 25 students. I happened to meet Principal Rainy shortly after, and said to him that I thought it was a great pity. 'Oh,' said Rainy, 'it is an honourable retirement.'

*From Dr. James Denney.*

MAYFIELD, MOFFAT, *April* 18, 1908.

Have you really a strong opinion that in order to the knowledge of 'our sacred books' all our ministers ought to know Latin and Greek and Hebrew? Quite frankly, I have not. Nobody values more highly a classical education than I do; but the things you can 'howk out of the original,' as Barrie says, are not things which accompany salvation, and though it is an immense advantage to a man to know Greek and Hebrew it is not by this knowledge that he is fitted either to evangelize or to edify. People get educated in every kind of way, and so should ministers; *some* are wanted trained in Old and New Testament criticism, and some trained in quite other subjects. What a man can't find in King James's version has little to do with the Kingdom of God. It might be bad for the Hall [1] if I said this to the First Year [students], but what we want is an educated rather than a learned ministry, and a more special and concentrated professional training.

Nicoll's reply to the above letter has not been preserved; but his later judgment on the subject is recorded in an article entitled 'The Preacher's Equipment and the Church's Task: An Interview with the Rev. Sir William Robertson Nicoll,' which the late Mrs. Herman contributed to the *Homiletic Review* for October 1912. To the question 'Ought Greek and Hebrew to be maintained as compulsory subjects for theological students?' Nicoll's answer was: 'On this point I most thoroughly disagree with my friend Professor James Denney. I don't see how a man can understand the methods and results of Biblical criticism and the principles of scientific interpretation unless he has a fair working knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was written. One must not demand too much, of course; but to acquire an intelligent knowledge of Greek and Hebrew within a course

[1] *I.e.* the Free Church College at Glasgow.

extending over four years is surely not too difficult. You remember Tennyson's indignant outburst: "What? And so your priests can't read their own sacred books?" He was quite right. Our priests must be able to read their sacred books; we must insist upon that.'

The same article records a criticism which Nicoll passed on the Student Christian Movement:

'It is, of course, a most hopeful and promising thing—that goes without saying. It has one weakness, in my opinion, and that is what Hilary of Poitiers has aptly called "an irreligious solicitude for God." The danger of the movement is a tendency to think that unless a thousand more missionaries are sent out within the next five years the whole world will be lost. But God will do His own work over us if not through us, and they seem to forget that He does not depend upon our efforts. "The evangelization of the world in this generation" is the watchword of a young impatience, born partly, no doubt, of the modern acceleration of pace, but rooted in the old, false apocalyptic conception of the speedy end of the world. I would like to know what they mean by "evangelizing the world in this generation." Two hundred years of the preaching of the Gospel in any given field have done little more than touch the fringe of it, centuries more being needed to effect evangelization in any valid thoroughgoing sense. This feverish, superficial conception of things springs from that "irreligious solicitude for God" to which Christian men are strangely addicted, and more than ever in this pragmatic age. I have lately come across a corrective in the shape of a text[1] I had never noticed before—"We are weak in Him." I should like to preach on that text. The irreligious solicitude for God wants to rush a victory, and thinks the honour of God is involved in the issue of its little plans and schemes. Christ accepted failure, and if we take Him as our Lord we must be content to be weak in Him.'

[1] 2 Corinthians xiii. 4.

# CHAPTER XXVII

## THE FREE CHURCHMAN

By temperament and training, as well as by deep-rooted conviction, Nicoll was a Free Churchman.[1] In that faith he never wavered, and it governed and illuminated his attitude on various crucial questions. Like other Nonconformists he often found himself drawn into spiritual sympathy with great Roman and Anglican teachers. He confessed his own indebtedness to the Christian scholars and saints of many communions. He saw clearly, however, that men eminent for holiness may yet hold false theories and perverted creeds.

After all, as Bishop Butler said in his oracular way, religion is nothing if it be not true. Nicoll believed that sacerdotalism is not true, because it contradicts the whole genius and tenor of the New Testament. If Christ and His Apostles had intended to found a hierarchy of priests, the New Testament—in its affirmations and in its omissions—would have been a book altogether unlike the book it is. Nicoll utterly rejected the dogma of 'tactual succession' (as he called it) which makes the imposition of a bishop's hands the sole covenanted channel of Divine grace, passed on from one generation to another. He found that dogma foreign to the primitive Church and disproved by the facts of spiritual experience in every century since. The conception of a divine right inherent in bishops he classed with the kindred conception of a divine right inherent in kings. The claim that an unbroken episcopal succession is essential to the life of the Church appeared to him analogous to the

[1] His earliest publication, at the age of twenty-three, was a pamphlet entitled 'Reasons for belonging to the Free Church': Aberdeen, 1874.

claim that verbal infallibility is essential to the inspiration of the Bible, and he found that both claims crumble away in contact with Christian scholarship and Christian experience. Although he held, as his letters show, anything but a low doctrine of the Christian Sacraments, he firmly maintained that those Sacraments are 'not exempted at any point from the law of moral action.' Therefore, when a priest baptizes a dying infant secretly against the will of its parents, or reserves a consecrated wafer for public adoration, such practices seemed to Nicoll's mind no better than magic. He believed, indeed, that men degrade the Gospel to the level of magic when they put any outward forms on the same plane of importance with Christian faith and Christian character.

Concerning the Holy Catholic Church itself Nicoll cherished an ideal which was so august and sublime that he could not endure the Church's privileges and prerogatives to be in subjection to the State. He hated Erastianism even more sternly, perhaps, than he revolted against superstition. To his mind it appeared a kind of blasphemy to intrude the Lion and the Unicorn among the symbols of faith. And never in his life did it occur to him that he should apologize for his Nonconformity. He always felt proud and thankful to be a Free Churchman.

Nicoll's instinctive attitude on this point comes out in a passage which we may quote from one of his published articles: 'We who are Dissenters by birth and by conviction may have something to pay in various ways, but we have not complained, I think, and we have not boasted. We have done our work, and we mean to go on doing it. Those who leave us we can afford to regard with charity. As Bagehot said, a man is not bound to be of the same religion as his grandmother, though if he has a grandmother Lois, it may be as well that he should be. We can even understand ex-Dissenters who speak with anger and contempt of the Churches they have left. . . . What I find it very difficult to put up with is the patronage of

ex-Dissenters. Some of my friends apparently rather like it. They meekly invite the deserters to play a part when there is anything special going on in the old place. So it comes to pass that those who have accomplished the heroic, the gallant, the chivalrous feat of turning their backs on their early faith appear weirdly from time to time in the pulpits of our churches and chapels. Nay, their moonlike faces are not unfamiliar when there is an election going on. They come back to the " singular structures " where they once sat with their fathers and mothers, and are most gracious, most kind, most condescending. You would scarcely imagine what dizzy heights they had reached. Now, I cannot understand this sort of thing. I get on very well with Anglicans of all shades and with Nonconformists of all shades, and in one case out of a hundred I recognize in an ex-Dissenter the pressure of conscientious conviction. But, as a rule, the process of passing from the unfashionable chapel to the fashionable church is about the meanest and shabbiest business transacted on this earth.' [1]

Among the statesmen of his own time there were two political leaders—Joseph Chamberlain and Lloyd George—for whom Nicoll cherished intense personal admiration. And unquestionably that admiration took account of the fact that each of them, throughout an illustrious public career, remained loyal to the Free Church in which he was born and bred. They have had more hold upon Nonconformists than any other statesmen, for the simple reason that they have understood Nonconformity.

When Chamberlain died in 1914, a month before the War, 'Claudius Clear' pointed out [2] how grievously Gladstone's antipathy to Chamberlain had injured the political fortunes of both, and added some sentences which illuminate Nicoll's own feeling towards the one and the other : ' I cannot understand how any one who has studied Gladstone's career can fail to see that he regarded Dissenters with something like loathing.

[1] 'Claudius Clear' in the *British Weekly* of January 2, 1902.
[2] In the *British Weekly* of July 9, 1914.

He knew that he was mainly indebted to them for his political victories ; he knew that they took his side and made it possible for him to prevail in causes that lay nearest his heart. Under extreme exigencies he would even compliment them and address their meetings and tolerate their company. But he never made a real friend, so far as I know, of any Dissenter.'

The following estimate of Chamberlain may be fitly inserted here :

*To Mr. Frank M. Boyd.*

*Nov.* 26, 1914.

For years of my youth, and indeed to the end, I cherished a singular affection and regard for Chamberlain. When I first started work in London, obscure and helpless, I received from him kindnesses which I shall never forget. He was particularly pleased with some articles I wrote about him in the *Spectator* some twenty-five or thirty years ago. But I confess I find myself entirely alone in my belief that his speeches are the best political speeches to read in the whole of English literature. To me it seems that the best of them are masterpieces of popular exposition. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and therefore they do not bear extracting. The way in which he started, in which he expounded the central part of his speech, and especially the way in which he closed, seems to me altogether admirable.

But I will tell you two opinions I got lately on the subject. Lloyd George told me that he had taken down to Walton Heath a volume of John Bright's. He thought a paragraph of John Bright was worth a speech of Chamberlain's. I was dining lately with Arthur Balfour, and as there were only three of us at the table I got much of his mind. He talked very freely and very generously of Parliamentary speakers, and indeed he was more generous to Liberals than to Conservatives. But when I stated my opinion of Chamberlain's speeches as matchless in their own way he altogether dissented. He said

that in his opinion Chamberlain never spoke in a first-class way except in debate, and that his prepared speeches all smelt too much of the lamp. He admitted that Chamberlain had very much annoyed him by advising him to prepare his public speeches. But still he thought that Chamberlain's elaborate preparations resulted in something of an artificial effect and that he never sounded the depths. So I most gladly admit that you may be right and that I may be wrong, but each of us has to walk according to his own lights.

Chamberlain always struck me as an extremely modest man, underrating very much his own literary gift and command of words. He used to say, ' You see, I am an uneducated man,' and in my opinion he had no reason to say so.

As to his change in opinions, I never varied for a moment from the belief that he was perfectly honest in all. He was not a self-seeking man in any base sense, but was capable of a very high generosity. He reached, I think, his summit in his speeches against Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill. They kindled him at the time, and when I look back on them they kindle him still. It is true that in a sense he was a Philistine. He seemed to have no idea of literature or of art. But how many statesmen have ? Such ideas as Gladstone had [on those matters] were all wrong.

And now good-bye for the present. I am going to read a new volume of the Life of Beaconsfield, who in my opinion is also a very much underrated statesman.

Like most Free Churchmen, Nicoll believed profoundly in the spiritual energy of the Gospel proclaimed by its living witnesses. He held that preaching the Word is one chief Christian means of grace. His volume entitled ' Princes of the Church ' includes few who were not princes in the pulpit. For sheer, overwhelming eloquence he placed Dr. Herber Evans above every other preacher he had heard.

But as a minister, to listen to regularly, he would have chosen Principal T. C. Edwards. Of Dr. Parker he confessed: 'I never heard him preach without saying, "I want to be a better man."' And to the end Nicoll preserved his admiration for the rare mystical genius of the Rev. S. A. Tipple of Norwood. In 1912 he told a friend: 'There have been two men in my life whose preaching I could have listened to twice every Sunday, and these two were Parker and Tipple. I did that with Tipple for years, and I never heard him preach a poor sermon.'

To illustrate Nicoll as a Free Churchman, we must refer to his action (1) during the controversy on Education, and (2) in the movement for Reunion.

The Education Bill for England and Wales which the Unionist Government introduced in 1902 was a challenge to Nicoll's dearest convictions. That Bill set out to place all denominational schools for the first time on a permanent basis at the ratepayers' expense. It was passed in the teeth of the solemn and indignant protest of the Free Churchmen of England and Wales. For it compelled them to pay a new rate in order to maintain in thousands of elementary schools religious teaching which they disbelieve and deny. In thousands of country parishes they were forced to send their children to schools, controlled by a parish priest and pervaded by a clerical atmosphere, where in numberless cases children would be made to feel that their own parents were schismatics and heretics. Moreover, it left three-fourths of the training colleges and a large proportion of the posts for teachers barred against those who do not conform to the Established Church. In face of such a denial of justice, Principal Fairbairn, who headed a representative deputation of Free Churchmen to Mr. Balfour, told him plainly 'We will not submit.' [1]

One direct result of this Act was the 'Passive Resistance' movement. Its real author was Alderman

[1] On June 12, 1902. As Nicoll reminded the Free Church Council at Brighton in March 1903, 'Those were words which ought never to have been used, unless they were used in the full integrity of their meaning.'

George White, M.P. for Norwich. Dr. Clifford became its most popular platform advocate. Nicoll enforced and defended it with his powerful pen,[1] besides addressing many meetings in its favour. In 1902 he had published a 'Catechism of the Education Bill,' which circulated by scores of thousands. 'Passive Resistance' was adopted with enthusiasm by the Baptist and Congregational Unions, by the Free Church Council, and by the great majority of prominent Nonconformist leaders. All over the country large numbers of Free Churchmen felt that they could not in conscience pay the new rate. With extreme reluctance, but after full deliberation, they decided that they must passively refuse the demand for payment. In thousands of cases their goods were distrained or sold, and many persons, including a number of ministers, suffered imprisonment.

Resentment against the Education Act of 1902 [2] undoubtedly played no small part in bringing about the catastrophe which fell upon its authors at the General Election of January 1906. One early measure of the new Liberal Government was a Bill, introduced by Mr. Birrell, which proposed to transfer all denominational schools to the local authorities, to provide 'Cowper-Temple' teaching in all alike, but in transferred schools to allow denominational teaching to be given twice a week by teachers not paid by the State. After long and heated debates, the Bill passed through the House of Commons by great majorities, but was finally strangled in the House of Lords.

In February 1908, Mr. M'Kenna (who had succeeded Mr. Birrell as President of the Board of Education) brought in another Education Bill, on similar

[1] In addition to a stream of articles in the *British Weekly*, Nicoll wrote signed contributions for the *Daily Mail* and the *Contemporary Review* (November 1902).

[2] Mr. Chamberlain wrote on September 22, 1902, to the Duke of Devonshire: 'I told you that your Education Bill would destroy your own party. It has done so. . . . If we go on, we shall only carry the Bill with great difficulty, and when it is carried we shall have sown the seeds of an agitation which will undoubtedly be successful in the long run.' This letter is printed in 'The Life of Spencer Compton, Eighth Duke of Devonshire,' by Bernard Holland. Longmans, 1911.

lines, but with restricted concessions to denominational schools. Throughout that year conferences went on which sought for some compromise on the problem of religious teaching in elementary schools. In the autumn a compromise was embodied in a Bill introduced by Mr. Runciman (who had succeeded Mr. M'Kenna), and this Bill was read a second time in the Commons by a majority of more than two to one. But in December signs arose of serious opposition from extremists on both sides, and consequently the Bill was dropped. It is needless here to narrate in detail the course of this embittered controversy. Ecclesiastical passions had been aroused which frustrated any fair settlement. The situation grew further complicated by the fact that Nonconformists themselves could not agree on a solution. They united in demanding (1) the public control of all State-supported elementary schools, and (2) the abolition of religious tests for teachers in such schools. But the Free Church Council further desired simple Bible teaching to be given in every school, and was willing to concede facilities for denominational teaching in such schools as had hitherto belonged to a denomination. Against this, however, others followed Dr. Clifford and would merely allow the Bible to be 'read as literature.' Others, again, agreed with Nicoll, whose personal position appears in the following letter:

*To Professor Peake.*

27 PATERNOSTER ROW, *June* 27, 1905.

In my first article on passive resistance I pointed out that if the teaching of the Bible was to be insisted upon by Nonconformists, they must be prepared to admit denominational teaching in school hours, and this in common fairness. It has been most distressing to me to see the folly and bigotry of men who imagine that we can force upon those who hold Catholic views the teaching that suits Protestants. It recalls the worst faults of the Nonconformists in their day of power, and of course is thoroughly impracticable. The Free Church Council has played

a wretched part in the business, but I have not liked to say much, fearing to make dissension among ourselves. For my part, I would allow Roman Catholic and Jewish schools to return to the conditions which they obtained before the Act [of 1902] passed. We felt then there was nothing to violate our conscience, and it would be a mighty gain to have the acquiescence of the Roman Catholics in any Bill proposed. I am sorry to think that many Nonconformists have just as little idea of religious freedom as the most bigoted Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

A further factor of great and growing importance in the vexed problem was the National Union of Teachers, a powerful and representative body which opposed any intrusion of denominational instructors into the elementary schools.

Moreover, the House of Lords, which had killed the Education Bill of 1906, went on rejecting measure after measure passed by the House of Commons. When the Peers finally threw out the Budget of 1909, they provoked a stormy conflict between the two Houses. After two general elections had taken place in 1910, the struggle ended in August 1911, when the 'Die-Hard' Peers swallowed the Parliament Bill, which considerably curtailed their powers. During 1912 and 1913 Mr. Asquith's Bills for Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment and Mr. Lloyd George's Land Scheme engrossed the field of political controversy.

The following letter written by Nicoll throws light on the situation :

*To the Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd George.*

St. Paul's House, Warwick Square, E.C.,
*March* 14, 1914.

I have been down two days at Norwich at the Free Church Council, and I thought you would like to hear some of my impressions. I was in the chair at the Passive Resistance meeting. We had a noble gathering, fully a thousand. Clifford and Guttery and I made strong speeches. Also I took part in the

regular meetings of the Council and endeavoured to form some idea of the drift. My distinct opinion was that the tide of Liberalism is rising. There is great anger at the idea of the Lords blocking the way and a determination not to be baffled in this fashion. At our Passive Resistance meeting we took the line of supporting the Government on condition that they gave us something to go to the country upon—that is, a single-school-area Bill of a strong sort. Clifford said that if this were done he and the rest of us would take the platform at the next General Election and fight as we did in 1906. Clifford said in his speech, 'I have illimitable confidence in the Government,' and Guttery and I took the same line.

But the really notable feature of the meetings was that the subject which excites enthusiasm is your Land Scheme. I mentioned Asquith's name and said that we fully trusted him. There was a mild response. But when I went on to speak of you and your scheme there was tremendous enthusiasm. The question of the agricultural labourers seemed to interest more than any other question, and on that subject in particular Guttery spoke admirably.

It was, however, the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 which practically made an end of Passive Resistance. To their honour be it recorded that stalwart Nonconformists forgot everything else in face of that tremendous national emergency.

*To Professor Hugh Mackenzie.*

[Of Wellington, New Zealand.]

*Dec.* 19, 1914.

I should not like to take any part in the New Zealand controversy on Education, as I know too little of the circumstances to form any valuable opinion. I myself have always been a convinced advocate of the secular solution. This does not mean that the children shall grow up without religion. It means that they shall be taught by believing teachers belonging to their own Churches.

This was, say thirty years ago, the general position among English Nonconformists. But now the tide has turned, and the great majority of them do not follow me in this matter, but are in favour of Bible teaching, which they call undenominational education. As things are in England, the only thing possible is a compromise of some sort. We have had various compromises and various Bills, but they have all been rejected by the Church of England. I myself was a member of a committee, of which Professor M. E. Sadler was chairman, and assented to the proposals on the ground that they were a compromise for the time being. Of course, the question has been swallowed up like all other questions by the War.

During recent years there have been several sincere but fruitless attempts to arrive at some agreed solution of the Education controversy in this country. The outstanding fact to be noted, however, is that the Act of 1902 has failed to operate in the fashion which was certainly intended and anticipated by its promoters.

The latest available statistics [1] are instructive, and not without an irony of their own.

| England and Wales. | Years. | Schools. | Accommodation. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Council Schools, . . | 1903 | 5975 | 3,065,169 |
| ,, ,, . . | 1923 | 8925 | 4,417,014 |
| Voluntary Schools, . . | 1903 | 14,238 | 3,722,317 |
| ,, ,, . . | 1923 | 11,906 | 2,679,106 |

These figures show roughly that in 1903 about 45 per cent. of the children were provided for in Council Schools, while nearly 55 per cent. were in voluntary schools. But in 1923 over 62 per cent. were in

[1] These figures are taken from Appendix iv., p. 173, of the Annual Report of the Board of Education for 1922-23 (published July 1924), Cmd. Z 179. According to a leaflet issued in 1924 by the National Society, the recognized training colleges for elementary school teachers in 1892 accommodated 3355 students, and of these the Church of England provided for 2225. But in 1923 the accommodation had risen to 12,842, and of these the Church of England only provided for 3766.

Council Schools, while under 38 per cent. were in Voluntary Schools. And this process of transference is steadily going on. Plato's words [1] apply even to Acts of Parliament: 'Nemesis, the messenger of justice, is appointed to watch over them.'

Besides the controversy on Education, Nicoll took a very decided position in the recent discussions and proposals as to corporate Christian reunion.

To-day English Christians are outwardly divided into two camps. And the real watershed which sets them apart is not any question of creeds, or sacraments, or liturgies, or ritual, or even establishment: it is the doctrine of apostolical succession. On one side are those who hold that an unbroken chain of bishops, ordained by their predecessors, is vital to the Christian Church, because through these officials alone Christ's covenanted grace is mediated and Christ's delegated authority is exercised. On the other side are those who believe that Christ Himself dispenses His own grace and exercises His own authority, while the chosen officers of His Church have their status not as legatees of a line of dead predecessors but as representing the living fellowship of believers wherein Christ Himself dwells in living power.

During the War, which fused so many barriers in one burning effort for the common end, Christians in this country felt drawn together in a great desire for unity. For instance, in 1916 and 1917 conferences took place between representatives of the various Evangelical Free Churches which resulted in proposals for a Federation [2] of the Free Churches. Another set of conferences held between certain selected Anglicans and Free Churchmen put out an interim report which laid down the following conditions of a possible reunion: (1) continuity with the historic Episcopate should be effectively preserved; (2) the Episcopate should reassume a constitutional

[1] 'Laws,' iv. 717.

[2] This Federation has been formally constituted, though without as yet attaining much practical result.

form ; (3) acceptance of the fact of Episcopacy should involve no theory as to its character.

In the autumn of 1918 the Rev. J. H. Shakespeare, who was then secretary of the Baptist Union, issued a volume entitled ' The Church at the Cross Roads,' in which he pleaded vigorously for a Federated Free Church, and also suggested that for the sake of reunion with the Anglican Church, Nonconformist ministers might accept some form of re-ordination by bishops. Nicoll published in the *British Weekly* of December 5 a leading article headed ' Mr. Shakespeare at the Cross Roads,' the gist of which may be gathered by the following extracts :

' If you suggest to the father of a family that he ought to be re-married to his wife, he will tell you that you are asking him to confess openly that he has been living hitherto in a state of concubinage and that his children are illegitimate.'

' For Free Church ministers to accept Episcopal ordination would be to admit solemnly and publicly that they were receiving some spiritual gift which they did not possess before. Now, with all possible respect and courtesy, we deny that the Bishop of London could confer any spiritual gift upon Dr. Clifford.'

' Free Churchmen are bound by their very existence to prize some things more highly even than the Church's visible unity. Their fathers believed sincerity and liberty to be far more precious—and they acted on that belief, and suffered for it. For a Free Church minister to submit to re-ordination by a bishop, because the minister considers the act to be a harmless form, whereas the bishop himself holds it to be a most solemn and vital necessity, must appear to plain men as shockingly insincere.'

*From D. C. Lathbury.*

Hascombe, Godalming, *Dec.* 9, 1918.

I read with great pleasure your article on Mr. Shakespeare. A Christian unity based, not on real agreement, but on an agreement to use important

words in two different senses, seems to me far worse than honest controversy. I have always thought that the Lambeth phrase 'Historic Episcopate' evades the real issue. Of course it is true, but it is not the important element in the truth.

*To Dr. Carnegie Simpson.*

*Dec.* 1918.

As to the Episcopacy business, it appears to me utterly and even scandalously unreal. You know very well that the High Church people do not look on the Denominations as Churches. What is the use of saying that the *Church Times*, or the party it represents, does so? The whole thing is utterly insincere. As for adopting Episcopacy for the government of the Church, you may depend upon it that our Churches will just as soon adopt polyandry. Of all forms of Church government the least democratic is the Episcopal.

*To Dr. J. D. Jones.*

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Jan.* 11, 1919.

I ought to have acknowledged your kind letter sooner, but I have been in very poor health. I am now writing to you confidentially and without careful balancing of what you say, but with the desire and the hope that we may see eye to eye, and with full recognition of the fact that you have a far more intimate knowledge of the Nonconformist Churches in England than I have. However, I have had a great many letters and communications of one kind and another. I shall put down my propositions as they occur to me, and I shall be very thankful for comments from you.

1. I have not been able to hear of any true concessions made by any representative man in the Church of England. It would be interesting to know whether any of the Evangelicals like Moule [1]

[1] Then Bishop of Durham.

have given any sign of their willingness to modify their terms. That people like Talbot [1] should be pleased with Shakespeare is quite natural. He means, if he means anything, a submission, and if we were in their position we should favour this as a sign of grace. So I think that expressions of sympathy with Shakespeare from the *Church Times* and from men like Talbot are simply reasons for additional watchfulness and care.

2. We shall not agree upon this point, but for my part I am thoroughly opposed to Episcopacy as a form of Church government. We fought out that battle in Scotland and know what prelacy means. I am confident that, save for a mere handful of men in the Church of Scotland, there is no disposition to revive in any form the Episcopal way of Church government. Nor do I believe that there is any such feeling among the English Nonconformists. The Church of Scotland has always allowed for the appointment of Overseers, but the scheme has never been practicable. The determination to retain Presbyterian parity has made Knox's provision a dead letter.

Further, Episcopacy seems to me the least democratic of all forms of Church government, and all the testimony I have from men in the field is to the effect that the assertion of the High Church claims was bitterly resented by the men. We shall make no headway at all by taking it for granted that Episcopacy in some form or other is to be the end of our labours.

3. The alternative between re-ordination in what Shakespeare calls its 'crude and bald form' and any form at all is quite out of the question. There is really no kind of re-ordination that is not crude and bald. An ambiguous and deceptive form of re-ordination is to my mind much more objectionable than the real thing itself.

If I wrote more on the subject I should have much to say to the proposal as it affects the people of our

[1] Then Bishop of Winchester.

Churches. The idea that they will go through Confirmation and all the rest of it is absolutely unthinkable. They cannot be handled in that way by committees of divines. . . . There is no disposition, as far as I can see, on the part of the Church of England to lower her requirements. I do not blame her for this, but I blame those who persist in believing what they know in their hearts is not true.

4. You may ask, Is there nothing to be done? I think there is something to be done.

(*a*) I highly approve of the increased friendliness between the Church and Nonconformity as shown in individual instances. I approve of more intercourse between the clergy of different denominations and their people. By promoting these as far as we can, we may be preparing the way for something grander and more beautiful than we can at present see before us.

(*b*) I should most highly approve of reunion between the Methodist bodies. There seems to be little enthusiasm in the matter, but that is the practical thing which can be done.

(*c*) I do not see why we should not have Federal Committees under the auspices of the National Free Church Council, or other auspices, to prevent the multiplication of chapels, and to arrange for union in places where it seems to be desirable. Not that I think there is any danger of multiplying chapels. We shall not be troubled that way for a long time to come. But what cannot be is the erection of a tribunal over the different denominations which shall determine the provision for public worship with a creed and the rest of it. The denominations will not abdicate their rights in that manner. Carnegie Simpson's creed is on the same level with Hugh Price Hughes's catechism. The one is as dead as the other. The time for creeds has passed. But we know roughly what we mean by Evangelicalism, and beyond that we shall not be able to go. Yet I think that healthy Christian opinion in the various districts might be so cultivated that overlapping

should gradually diminish, as it has done in the U.F. Church of Scotland since the Union.

5. I most strongly object to the minatory talk that goes on to the effect that if we do not agree to any human proposals that may be made we are enemies of Church unity and nearing our end. Shakespeare and his immediate friends have that way of speaking. Either, they say, submit to Episcopacy or go under. I do not believe this in the very least degree. I think there may be better times before Nonconformity than Nonconformity has ever seen. In any case it is hard to kill a Church, and if some of our Churches may perish in the act of upholding their testimony, then it shall be said of them, 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.'

6. I think there is a great and just dislike of private conclaves and conferences.. They may possibly do a little good. They occupy the time of some of our professors who have now nothing to do but draw their incomes. But these men have no mandate from us, the common people of the Churches. We never authorized them to surrender our principles or to betray our rights.

7. Lastly—for I must not go on for ever—have you considered how far it would be possible for our Churches to become Established Churches, or to unite with Established Churches? The whole thing appears to me crazy.

Now I have laid before you in a very rough form my main ideas, and I am more than willing to take instruction and correction from you.

*To Dr. Clifford.*

*Feb.* 21, 1919.

. . . Since I am writing, I want to say that I and others are disappointed by your strict silence on the proposals for re-ordination. I think it is dead, and one who was present at the last Oxford conclave declares that they have come upon a brick wall. . . . But apart from re-ordination, there have been some very

evil signs. In the first place, an attempt has been made to commit our Churches to the Episcopal form of government. I am a Presbyterian and I detest the Episcopal form. You know what Liddon[1] said—that he would never accept it if he had not found it in the Bible, because he saw the evil it had done in provoking jealousies, bitternesses, and ambitions of a worldly kind. We Presbyterians hold fast by the doctrine of Presbyterian parity, and I am sure we shall continue to do so. I am much mistaken if the Baptists are going to go in for Episcopacy in any shape or form. I have no objections to federation, but I object to formulating new creeds which may mean anything or nothing. We must trust each other. Creeds will do us no good.

My dear Dr. Clifford, I have never seen you standing back from the battle before.

We may quote Dr. Clifford's prompt and explicit reply:

18 Waldeck Road, West Ealing, *Feb.* 22, 1919.

I am very glad you have spoken so frankly with reference to my 'silence' during the controversy on Mr. Shakespeare's book. I should not have thought of explaining or defending my silence if you, my good and true friend of so many years, had not directly raised the question; but it is due to you that I should mention two or three facts belonging to this experience.

First of all, let me say, I had some doubts as to whether I ought not to take up my pen. I was asked to review the book. I read it with that purpose; but when I discovered the goal to which Mr. Shakespeare would lead us, I knew that he had created an insuperable barrier to the carrying out of his own plans of the Federation of Churches and I concluded

[1] The reference is to a letter from Canon Liddon to Dr. A. K. H. Boyd, printed in the latter's 'Twenty-five Years at St. Andrews,' vol. ii. :—'If I did not believe the evidence to be decisive I do not think I should belong to an Episcopal communion. The Episcopate, if not necessary to the Church, is surely a wanton cause of division among the Reformed Christian communities, to say nothing of the evils of ecclesiastical ambition which it sometimes occasions.'

I need not write : and when I saw your article, that decision was confirmed. I saw that the issues of the controversy were settled, for once and for all. It was not necessary to write a line ; and although you, like most of my friends, will have difficulty in believing it, yet I am always eager to escape a fight if I can *with a good conscience*. There was a completeness about your exposure that gave me the satisfaction that here at least I might leave my sword in its sheath. The peril was gone. Truth was safe.

Besides I had no fear whatever about our own people. Baptists are intensely anti-clerical. Whilst they place the highest value on the Christian Church and regard it as Christ's own creation, they are as keenly individualistic as the Apostle Paul ; and as resolute in their defence of the democratic and self-determining power of the Church of the New Testament as John Smyth—provided always that the Christian society is composed of those who are consciously disciples of Christ. Not one moment's misgiving concerning our people troubled me. They are in no danger of going over to the Anglican Church. They repudiate any surrender of the ' crown rights ' of their King and Saviour. They are out-and-out Liberationists : put intellectual integrity before formal unity, devotion to truth before submission to institutions, resent the notion of baptismal regeneration, and insist on the freedom which leaves the soul and the society open without any check to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Then, next, as I have said in conversation with friends, all ' the stars in their courses ' are fighting against union with the Church of England, the authority of the Episcopate, the dogma of re-ordination and the whole of the machinery for displacing the Christianity of Christ by the Cyprianism of the fourth century. The old Episcopal order was a part of feudalism, and you cannot bring it back into modern life. Autocracy survives in the Pope : but nowhere else ; and in him it is a withering force. ' The Free Church in a Free State ' is the advancing

and conquering ideal. An exclusive priesthood has no basis in the religion of Jesus. The New Testament is coming to its own, and the Christianity of the early days is again triumphing over Institutionalism. These three facts, along with my reputation as an anti-clerical, seemed to justify my 'standing back' in this particular battle.

Perhaps I ought to add another set of facts that weighed with me. I have spent a good deal of time with persons who were, or thought they were, at 'cross-roads,' and I have found the atmosphere they brought with them far from oxygenating. More than twenty years ago I was doomed to sit on a Committee to deal with 'overlapping,' only to discover that it was possible to talk much, labour at tables of figures, and achieve nothing beyond. Often I have listened to denunciations of 'small churches' and to the best plans for getting rid of them, as though the large churches did the best work for the Kingdom of God. I have also taken part in promoting *ecclesiastical* unity; but I am far from being sure that it was the best use I could have made of my time. Still, I am most eager for unity —for *Christian* unity—yes, and for human unity, as in our Brotherhoods, and you, Sir William, will remember that along with Charles Williams I had some share in effecting the organic union of two denominations, the General and Particular Baptists, who had moved apart, and often in antagonism, from 1611 and 1633 up to 1891. But now under the influence in part of this War we are in danger, as it seems to me, of sacrificing sincerity, liberty, and the truth of the Gospel for the sake of obtaining an external and mechanical uniformity. You say that this movement is up against a 'brick wall.' I agree; and seeing the strength and size of the wall I concluded I might find some other use for what still remains to me of life than to engage in this battle.

But I must confess that working in my subconsciousness, I doubt not, was my attachment to my friend Mr. Shakespeare. Some of my friends, Sir

William, have given me some trouble of late. Mr. Shakespeare and I are very old friends. We love one another. We have worked together. We have mostly agreed '*except in opinion.*' More than once I have defended him ; and I would far rather uphold him now than attack him, if it were possible. But he knows my ineradicable hostility to clericalism in every shape and form, and will know that my silence is a proof of my continued affection for him, and not of concurrence with his teaching ; and further he will know that if I had thought, for a moment, that there was any need for me to speak in defence of the cardinal principles of the Gospel I should not have kept silence.

I have written at length and with a frankness corresponding to your own, so that you may understand that ' silence ' which has been a ' surprise ' to you and ' to others.'

I am, with kindest regards,

Very sincerely yours,

JOHN CLIFFORD.

The Lambeth Conference of 1920, at which over 250 Anglican bishops assembled, published in the August of that year an official summary of its proceedings, including an impressive ' Appeal to all Christian People.' Nicoll paid a heartfelt tribute to the noble and lofty spirit which inspired its conclusions and proposals. Free Churchmen felt that a fresh era had dawned in their relations with the Church of England when it offered to negotiate with non-episcopal Churches on terms of spiritual equality. This memorable new departure showed the influence of some 150 bishops from the Dominions, the United States, and the mission field, who taken together formed a considerable majority of the whole Conference. Obviously the problem of reunion assumes an aspect of its own in a country like the United States, where for each communicant in the Protestant Episcopal Church there are twenty communicants in non-episcopal Churches. But Nicoll thankfully acknowledged that

the Lambeth Conference had lifted the whole question on to a new plane of Christian fairness and sympathy and charity.

The Lambeth proposals in regard to home reunion received very earnest and serious consideration by all the Free Church Assemblies in this country. But it became more and more evident that the crux of the whole matter was—and is—the question of Episcopal ordination. With deep reluctance and regret, honest men who hold diametrically opposite convictions on this point came in the end to recognize that they can never combine on the strength of a formula, however ingeniously worded and graciously intended, which different sides construe in different senses. During the whole discussion Nicoll steadfastly maintained that as to re-ordination there is no discoverable compromise. It is true, alas, that 'the wounds of the Church of Christ are very deep and very stiff with time and controversy. They cannot be quickly healed.'

On the other hand, Nicoll had ardent faith in the reunion of all Methodists and the reunion of all Presbyterians. He wrote to Dr. Carnegie Simpson in December 1921 : 'It will be heart-breaking if the Scottish Churches refuse to unite. They are infinitely more hopeful than anything connected with Lambeth.'

In our generation Free Churchmen have possessed no braver and more brilliant publicist than Nicoll, no advocate more amply equipped and informed, no champion more passionately sincere. Nonconformists might inscribe over his grave those words which the Carthaginians wrote over the grave of Hannibal : 'We vehemently desired him in the day of battle.'

# CHAPTER XXVIII

## THE MYSTIC

Mysticism implies an immediate intercourse between the human soul and the Divine Spirit. Religion itself is rooted in the belief that such a communion is granted to any man who purifies himself to seek it with his whole heart. Indeed personal religion, and therefore real religion, hardly exists apart from some experience of this mystic contact with God's living reality. In every age of the Church there have been Christians whose temper and vocation turned them away from intellectual questionings and from ecclesiastical forms, and drew them towards the Source and Object of faith. They forsook all lower aims in their ardour to know God personally for themselves, to explore His secrets, to behold His face, to taste His beatitude. Masters of the interior life have described the stages in the upward path of prayer and surrender and purification and illumination which they trod in this spiritual quest. And their experience of saintly attainment, mingled though it be with strange and subtle intoxications, speaks to encourage souls who still hunger and thirst after righteousness rather than after riches or learning or renown.

From his Highland ancestry Nicoll inherited a temperament in tune with the genius of mysticism. His own attitude towards the mystics may be gathered from the following letter of enquiry, which he addressed to Mr. Arthur Edward Waite. This remarkable author has been described as 'the exponent in poetical and prose writings of sacramental religion and the higher mysticism, understood in its absolute separation from psychic and occult phenomena.' Nicoll consulted Mr. Waite, in view of a lecture on

Christian mysticism which he had undertaken to prepare for the Summer School of Theology at Glasgow in June 1905.

27 Paternoster Row, London, *April* 29, 1905.

Although I have read a good many books on Christian mysticism for a good many years, I am merely an amateur in the subject. You will immediately detect this, but it is important perhaps that you should know that I know my position. I have been for more than twenty years literary adviser and editor for Hodder & Stoughton's publishing house, and one of the first books I published in that capacity was a translation of Martensen's Jacob Behmen. I have not found the manuals on mysticism in English—R. A. Vaughan and Inge—of much use. What I have been able to get is from the books themselves and from you.

What I would like specially is some expansion, with references, of the following sentence in your 'Sénancour'[1]: 'He is of course a signpost only on the road of the mystics, pointing to peace and retirement, the silence of the passions, the sufficiency of the second best, and the satisfaction and good promise of duty understood in no recondite sense. But to the heights and the depths of the many mansions of mystery which are in the house of man, to the great desolations and derelictions, and to the great raptures—to these he does not point.' I understand partially, but only very partially, and my limited reading does not enable me to illustrate with any fullness.

The subject of my lecture is 'The Practical Uses of Mysticism.' As it will be addressed mainly to Christian ministers, it will deal with Christian mysticism. I wish to point out how Christian mysticism helps Christians (1) in the conduct of life; (2) in the shaping of theology.

(1) Christian mysticism emphasizes if possible the Christian doctrine that the chief business of life is

[1] 'Étienne Pivert de Sénancour: Obermann. With a biographical and critical introduction by A. E. Waite.' 1903.

to find God, and that in the finding of God all is included.

God is to be found by the inward way, but the pursuance of the inward path may involve great external consequences. In order to pursue the inward way it may be necessary to abandon worldly ambitions and possessions. In any case the heart must be delivered from them. The only way of deliverance for many is the external deliverance. They must be poor and free in order to find God. Does the New Testament contemplate the case of a rich Christian? Does it go any higher than 'having food and raiment, therewith let us be content'? Is not a rich mystic in any real sense a contradiction in terms? Happiness depends on the things that are within ourselves, and thus the mystical parting from our common ambitions is not or should not be a painful parting.

Now, under this head does not Quietism come in? Does not Quietism mean, not only a certain sacred indifference to one's own personal fortunes, but also an equally sacred indifference to the fortunes of public causes? Thus, John Bunyan lived in a time of fierce conflict, and during much of that time was a prisoner. But it was only the other year that we knew certainly that he was a soldier in the Parliamentary army. I have not found any but the faintest echoes of the strife in his pages. This does not mean that he was indifferent to the struggle, or that he did not take his part in it, but that he looked at it from the Divine point of view. (This is very clumsy, but I hope intelligible.)

Under the same head would come the rewards of the mystic, in the raptures—but on this I have not much matter.

(2) The mystical view of theology.

The fierce battles between theologians might largely have been avoided if theologians had possessed the mystical temper. These battles have been caused by attempts at mathematically defining what cannot be mathematically defined. You cannot

say *either—or*. The Christian mystic is, to use a Scotch word, 'far ben.' He does not use propositions as sharp alternatives. One thing may be true, but only superficially. He goes deeper, and finds a deeper truth, and a deeper still. The truths are not in conflict.

Thus, (*a*) take the controversy about the Eucharist. The theologian says either the Eucharist is a simple memorial or you cannot escape the doctrine of transubstantiation. The mystical attitude to the Eucharist would be, I conceive, to admit that there is a mystery in it, which may be partially scattered but will never disappear. Thus the mystic would decline to choose between the memorial theory and the transubstantiation theory. To any theory of his own he would add a *plus*.

Or, (*b*) take the doctrine of Holy Scripture. For the last twenty years as editor of the *Expositor* I have had a great deal to do with discussions about the higher criticism. The higher critic seems to the orthodox to destroy the authority of Holy Scripture, and in many cases he himself believes he has done so. But I think the Christian mystic would smile at this. He would be neither on the one side nor on the other; or perhaps he might be on both sides. Thus, the higher critic says that the 53rd chapter of Isaiah was designed by the writer to refer to Jeremiah, or perhaps to the personified Jewish nation. The orthodox Christian maintains that the reference is to Christ, and probably he will fight for an earlier date and for the Jesianic authorship. Would not the mystic deny that the chapter was to be permanently interpreted by the intention of the original author? Supposing he and his intention were both discoverable, would not the mystic say that the original intention in the mind of the author signified very little? Because it is given to a man to write a thing, it does not follow that he understands a thing. He may wholly misunderstand it. The intention of the inspiring Spirit may be revealed only by time. It does not matter when the prophecy was written. As we have it, we see

that it is a true prophecy of Christ, and that is what matters. Of course, the critical details have a certain value and interest of their own, but it is entirely subordinate.

I should like to get any illustrations of this, as many people are bruising themselves against the higher criticism. I read in Shorthouse's biography the other day that when he published 'The Little Schoolmaster Mark,' Canon Ainger preached upon it and said that it meant so and so. Shorthouse wrote to Ainger that this was not what he meant, but that he meant thus and thus. Afterwards, however, on consideration, he wrote to Ainger and said that he saw Ainger was right, and that he meant what Ainger said he meant. I am sure there must be other instances, and I think I can turn up one or two.

Then again, with regard to the doctrine of Scripture, according to the higher criticism there is but one single simple sense. The higher criticism rejects allegory and parable ; but for the mystic this cannot be true, inasmuch as nature itself is parabolic, and grace also. The point of difficulty emerges when the relation between parable and history comes to be considered. Does mysticism dissolve historicity, or make all historicity unimportant ? Is it true, for example, that it does not matter whether Christ rose from the dead or not, whether Joseph's tomb was left empty ? Or is it not true that all parable rests upon fact, though it may be impossible to say what the precise amount of fact is ?

I have a great deal more to say, but already I have written more than enough for the time. There are three questions about mysticism which somewhat perplex me.

Has mysticism any real place for an atonement ? Does any Christian mystic go further than William Law or Saint-Martin ? [1]

The great objection brought against mysticism

[1] Mr. Waite had published 'The Life of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, the Unknown Philosopher, and the Substance of his Transcendental Doctrine.' London, 1901.

by Wesley (who was deeply influenced by it) was that it was not practical, that the mystics did not work. Is not the true reply to this to be found in saying that there is room for many kinds of service in the kingdom of God, and that the mystics who moved Wesley were serving God as well as he? Is it not right to recognize a division of labour, and to say that it is best for a mystic to cultivate his gifts, and for a practical worker to learn from the mystic without engaging himself too deeply in the effort to be a mystic himself?

The whole mystical doctrine of prayer is also not clear to me. It is not clear in what sense the mystic believes in the specific answer to specific petition. Is it that the mystic gains such an insight into the mind of God that he offers prayer and supplication for what God desires to give and will give in His time?

Mr. Waite is not only a profound mystical scholar and thinker, but also most generous in imparting his spiritual knowledge. In reply to these enquiries he wrote a long and carefully considered answer of great value. Much of it Nicoll embodied in his own lecture on 'Christian Mysticism,' which was delivered at the Summer School of Theology in Park Parish Church, Glasgow, on June 23, 1905. The lecture formed the first part of 'The Garden of Nuts'—a volume of mystical expositions of Scripture which appeared in the autumn of the same year. This is perhaps the most original and suggestive of Nicoll's books on religion. He wrote in October to his friend Mr. T. W. Stoughton: 'My "Garden of Nuts" is published. I do not suppose many people will care for it, but I like it myself.'

The following letters illustrate how the book was received by his friends:

*From Dr. James Denney.*

15 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow, *Oct.* 19, 1905.

'The Garden of Nuts' is good to look at and to walk in, and I am glad to have an essay on mysticism

in a shape so convenient. In spite of Peake and Stevens and many more—perhaps even in spite of you—I consider myself a mystic ; just as Dr. Johnson considered himself a very polite man. I am glad therefore that you are going to do something on Behmen,[1] for Behmen had the vein of poetry in him which is wanted to redeem mysticism from dreariness if not from futility. It is a kind of feeling, and when it is reduced to grammar or to the form of reason it is unrecognizable and unreal. I heard a criticism on your paper as read at the Summer School from a non-professional man, not much educated, but quite intelligent. 'As far as I could make out,' he said, 'mysticism seems to be another name, and not so good a one, for Christianity.' It struck me as not bad.

*From Principal P. T. Forsyth.*

HACKNEY COLLEGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Nov.* 1, 1905.

You please me so much by sending me 'The Garden of Nuts.' I am reading it with great sympathy. I have misrepresented myself in having left the impression you get as to my attitude to mysticism. Pietism I confess to disliking, but I love the mystics. Bernard is my favourite saint and his 'Canticles' an old delight. I only object to mysticism used as the sufficient basis of religious certainty for a whole Church. I seem to see many of our ministers going to seed or to slush on it, and exercising a vague ministry which becomes vaguer and feebler still as it filters down through their people. I fancy they think it easier—though to the true mystic it is certainly not so.

[1] In a 'Prefatory Note' to his book, Nicoll stated: 'I have in preparation a history of Behmenism in England. In this, I hope to supply a bibliography, as full as I can make it, of English works on Mysticism.' This subject fascinated his mind for many years. The lives of the English Behmenists have never been written, 'nor is there, so far as we know, any clear indication of the two periods when Behmenism was a power in the religious development of our country.' (See 'The Return to the Cross,' p. 106.) In a letter during the War he wrote: 'The only bit of mystical work I could do is the history of Behmenism in England, as to which I have collected a good deal of MS. material; but these are not the times for doing it.'

Nicoll's spiritual meditations were written with a poetic fervour of phrasing which at times barely escaped rhapsody, though his fine instinct saved him from that peril. Such impassioned religious writing was a new thing in journalism. He seems to have learned it from Dora Greenwell. Both for matter and manner he set her far above the other Englishwomen who have ventured to deal with the deep things of God. He considered that he had learnt more theology from Dora Greenwell than from any other teacher, and he delighted in her books. 'As all readers of her books—and it is to be desired that they were much more numerous—are aware, she possessed the true mystic note of passionate religious feeling. She had also explored fields of study and thought very little frequented before or after her time, and in particular had a wide acquaintance with Lamennais, Lacordaire, and the writers of the Quietist school. The rich and beautiful quotations in which her books abound are largely derived from these ; and I have had in my possession the note-books which she left behind, in her exceptionally clear and beautiful handwriting, containing many more.' [1]

After Dora Greenwell, he drew on the wealth of mysticism which he found stored in the works of J. M. Neale and C. H. Spurgeon—to whose revered memories 'The Garden of Nuts' is inscribed. Nicoll always insisted that educated Christians undervalue Spurgeon's wisdom as a spiritual teacher, 'a great doctor of the Church.' In England 'we have had great Evangelical mystics, the two greatest beyond comparison being Bunyan and Spurgeon.' He specially admired the latter's volume of sermons on Canticles. The following letter was written in July 1917, in reply to a suggestion that he should undertake a biography of Spurgeon :

> I heard him preach a good many times, but my only qualification for writing a book is that I think I have an exceptional knowledge of his sermons.

[1] 'James Macdonell,' p. 255.

> At least, I have not met any one with the same knowledge. There are a great many things in these sermons which show that he was not at all the narrow and illiterate bigot that many people think him. On the contrary, he had great breadth of mind. He made serious concessions to the new spirit, and was far better read and far more able and powerful intellectually than most people think. A good biography should be written by one who knew intimately his manner of living and his way of thinking. But most of his old students who have written about him have failed entirely to do justice to the deeper and finer element in his mind and culture.

Nicoll had an ear to recognize authentic music in unexpected places. To another correspondent he wrote: 'I think Kipling reaches the things which can hardly be put into words but which, as the mystics teach us, nourish the soul.' It was characteristic that he liked to go and hear sermons by unknown preachers in little half-empty Strict Baptist meeting-houses, and he set store by periodicals such as the *Gospel Standard* and the *Earthen Vessel*, belonging to the same school, and containing memoirs of godly old men and women who worshipped in humble village chapels.[1] In such memoirs, as in Spurgeon's sermons, he found, expressed perhaps in uncouth dialect, the marrow of spiritual experience. This catholic perception of essential truth under wide variations of form belongs to the mystical doctrine of the Holy Assembly—the great communion which embraces all faithful souls dispersed throughout the world. Nicoll was fundamentally the opposite of sectarian. Once when he heard religious men of a very different school sharply criticized, he quietly quoted the words, 'He appeared unto them in another form.' He realized the immense orthodoxy which underlies all our differences. He claimed and cherished his fellowship with Christians to whom he stood in acute ecclesiastical opposition.

[1] See Appendix II.: The 'Strict and Particular Baptists.'

One instance of this appeared in connexion with Father Stanton's 'Last Sermons in St. Alban's, Holborn.'[1] In the preface to that volume the Rev. E. F. Russell wrote :

'The preservation and publication of these sermons of Father Stanton's is due entirely to the discernment and the initiative of Sir William Robertson Nicoll. In common with a large number of persons who stand outside the Church of England, Sir William was greatly attracted by the preacher and his preaching. He recognized and appreciated the fine quality of his speech, its transparent sincerity, its perfect naturalness, its spirituality, and, above all, the glowing personal love for the Lord Jesus Christ which streamed through all he said. More or less, we all of us thought thus of our friend's work, but Sir William was wiser than we, in his conviction that the preacher's words, even apart from the preacher himself, had an inherent vitality of their own, and would, if they were preserved, be found to retain something of their original force and fragrance. . . . The sermons are simply a report—a verbatim report—by an accomplished shorthand writer whom Sir William, more prescient than we, commissioned on many occasions to take down what was said. . . . Sir William has been good enough to consult me on the choice of the sermons to be published, and has entrusted to me the responsibility of the quite unimportant editing which is all that can, with safety, be attempted. His wish is—and with this wish I am in the heartiest agreement—that, in fairness, the selection should exhibit not part but the whole of the preacher's mind on the great truths of religion ; not his evangelicalism only, but also his uncompromising, outspoken conviction that the Catholic faith, and Catholic practice, represent through time the substance of the saving Gospel which he was sent to proclaim.'

Outside 'The Garden of Nuts' a genuine mystical vein runs through Nicoll's writing on religious sub-

[1] Published at Christmas 1915. Compare also Nicoll's leaders on 'An Evangelical High Churchman' and on 'Father Stanton' in the *British Weekly* of July 11, 1907, and of June 7, 1917.

jects—notably in the chapters on 'The Secret of Christian Experience' and on 'The Wisdom of God in a Mystery,' which are included in his volume 'The Return to the Cross,' and in the sermon on 'Aspects of the Mystical Union' in 'The Lamp of Sacrifice.' He believed that 'the mystery of union with Christ is the ultimate mystery and experience of the Christian faith.' But he also doubted whether the highest spiritual truth can ever be embodied in words—just as it has been said that the most poetical region of all is that which is incapable of taking the form of poetry. 'Some things are impossible to utter, and other things it is unlawful to utter. Over such truths the spirit wanders brooding till it becomes vocal, and that is the utterance we have from mystics.'

Only a few months before he died, he remarked to a friend: 'I believe in the Old Testament, interpreted by common sense and taken back as far as may be to its parabolic and allegoric use. Christ Himself preached the truth by parable, and without parable spake He not unto them. Why should not God speak in parables to His poor people?' And this sentence occurs in a letter during the War: 'When we have done our best, and when we have used the Bible to the full, there still remains much mystery, and we can only wait till the mystery of God shall be finished.'

Nicoll himself made no kind of claim to be a mystic of the first order. Yet he had profound sympathy with mystical aspirations. He believed in and apprehended the symbolism of nature and the symbolism of Scripture. All his days he was a seeker after the Perfection hidden behind these mortal shadows of sense and time. And not seldom he wrote as one whose eyes had seen a vision of the Everlasting Rose

> Is it a dream?
> Nay, but the lack of it the dream,
> And failing it, life's lore and wealth a dream,
> And all the world a dream.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### PERSONALIA

Enough has been written to reveal what remarkable qualities were combined in this remarkable man. His character had many facets, which gleamed with varied colours from different points of view. The outside public wondered at the volume and versatility of his output as a journalist. But the men who came close to him were impressed by his intellectual power. He could take hold of some complex question in theology or politics or literature and pierce straight to the heart of the real issues involved. His mind moved with masterly ease and vigour, even where his judgments might be imperfect or mistaken.

Not uncommonly Nicoll was misunderstood. Beneath his suave surface lived a proud, resolute, dominating personality. Courage seemed part of his very nature, and he had an inner sense of dignity which it was unsafe for strangers to ignore. Yet he could take a humorous view of the condescension sometimes exhibited by officials. It is on record, for example, that a certain Chief Liberal Whip on one occasion sent a message, saying that he urgently wanted to see Nicoll and asking whether Nicoll would call for this purpose at the House of Commons or at the Reform Club as might be most convenient. The following message went back to the Chief Whip : ' Tell him I shall be at my printers' on Wednesday morning, and in my room at Warwick Square on Wednesday afternoon, and up at my house, Bay Tree Lodge, on Thursday, and I will be glad to see him at any of these places if he will call on me.' And the call was duly paid.

In common with all original men, Nicoll had his own distinct limitations—both racial and individual.

Who can analyse those subtle strains of blood and speech and temper and tradition which blend together into nationality? Who can define the strange unlikeness between men bred north and south of the Tweed? Nicoll always remained a Scot, in the marrow of his bones and in the prejudices of his nature. Perhaps it is true, as a shrewd observer has suggested, that nobody but a Scot, and a northern Scot at that, could fully understand him. On the other hand, although he spent the second half of his life in London, he arrived there too late to assimilate entirely the *ethos* of England.[1] Like most transplanted Scotsmen, he understood English literature better than he understood English religion. To him the liturgy and ritual of Anglican worship made no appeal. And he never quite penetrated into the inner mind even of English Free Churchmen. The marvel was that he managed to know them as intimately as he did. Suppose an English clergyman who had reached the age of thirty-five were to migrate to Aberdeen, how could such a man ever hope to handle Scottish ecclesiastical problems with native certainty? Scotland is not England, nor is Puritanism here the same thing as either the Auld Kirk or the Free Kirk. And so, in spite of his rare gifts, Nicoll never quite understood English Nonconformists. He appreciated and loved their great figures, but it is doubtful if he exactly knew what it is that burns like a fire in Independency. He never became at home—as Spurgeon and Parker were at home by instinct—among Nonconformists in the mill-towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, in the village chapels of East Anglia and Wessex. Probably Nicoll himself lived unconscious of the defect which they silently felt in this Scotsman whom they honoured as their mouthpiece and champion.

The master of Abbotsford himself made a candid

[1] Dr. Denney recognized this in the case of another distinguished Scotsman, when he wrote to Nicoll after the Education controversy began in 1902: 'Fairbairn can never be an Englishman, with all his ability, and there could not be a more fatal drawback to any one wishing to deal with an English question.'

confession :[1] 'Perhaps one ought to be actually a Scotsman to conceive how ardently under all conditions of rank and situation, they feel their mutual connexion with each other as natives of the same country.' It was natural, it was almost inevitable, that Nicoll's nearest friends should hail from the north, as did also his best correspondents. He could not help being an enthusiastic literary patriot, with a keen and kindly eye for Scottish literary merit. On the *British Weekly* most of his assistants and most of his contributors were Scots. This bias did something to lessen the paper's range in England, but gave it immense influence north of the Tweed. The most savage article which ever appeared in its columns was the editor's onslaught on W. E. Henley's characterization of Robert Burns.

In other directions Nicoll was a man whose nature had well-defined limits. Thus, for example, he cared nothing for music, and scarcely appreciated any other kind of art. Few pictures interested him, except portraits, though he admired the faces of Rossetti's women. With a mind of such range it was remarkable that he knew hardly anything about science, and never seriously tried to learn. Like Tristram Shandy, he had 'neither genius, nor taste, nor fancy,' for mechanism. He rarely carried a watch, and one day when his daughter was looking at hers he remarked, 'I should hate to know how it works.' Nicoll maintained the most engaging thing about Rousseau to be this—that when he was modestly provided for he got rid of his watch, with the singular and joyful reflection that he would never again need to trouble about the time. 'For myself,' said Nicoll, 'I particularly dislike people who profess to be busy and seem to be hurried, people who look at the clock when you visit them or when they visit you.' Though he accomplished such an immense amount of work, it was astonishing that he himself never appeared to bustle or worry over it. He worked intensely but quietly, without fret or friction, and he never seemed out of breath.

[1] In 'The Heart of Midlothian,' chap. xxxviii.

To form any proper estimate of Nicoll we must bear in mind that through most of his mature life he had to battle continually against feeble health. The marvel was that any man with a wounded lung could achieve the quantity of work [1] which he accomplished. When you met him, you saw a slight, spare figure of frail physique, whose broad forehead and keen eyes gave unmistakable distinction to his appearance. What struck you about his dress were the white shirt-cuffs that projected over his hands. He came forward with slow shuffling gait, and greeted you in soft measured tones touched with an Aberdonian accent. While he talked he would stroke his moustache with the tips of thin delicate fingers, gazing dreamily through eyelids that seemed half-closed, though his mind was intensely alert.

Nicoll's physique explains his fondness for lying in bed. He thoroughly agreed with Leigh Hunt as to the advantage of people in bed over people who are up. And he had great sympathy with Descartes, who is said to have ' created the higher mathematics while sipping brown soup under the blankets in broad day.' Nicoll himself dictated many hundred of articles from his bed. It was weird to watch him as he lay there, amid a medley of newspapers and books and pipes and cigarette ashes, and to know that his brain was busy absorbing knowledge and incubating ideas all the time.

Like most persons who escape the average, Nicoll cherished some quaint private tastes. Though he hated spiritualism, he was at one time strangely intrigued by palmistry. In his later years he took much delight in cinemas. He also agreed with Paley's dictum that ' happiness is found with the purring cat.' He had an immense affection for these animals, and it pleased and soothed him to hear them purr by his study fire. Bay Tree Lodge was never without a couple of sleek pets, whose characters their master used to observe and dilate upon. He would assuredly have

[1] The British Museum Catalogue—apart from periodical literature—contains nearly ninety references under his name.

given a prize to the Westminster boy three centuries ago who wrote :

*O felicula blandula,*
*O felicula dulcis !*
*O mihi semper amanda*
*Aliis longe prae multis !*

Indeed we may apply to Nicoll what he himself said about his old friend Dr. Richard Garnett : ' He had none of the roughness of Dr. Johnson, but he had all his tenderness and many of his tastes. In particular, like all good men, he was a devoted lover of cats.'

He used to maintain that colds, neuralgia, and most other ills arise from the great modern curse of Fresh Air. He often declared that if he could have his way, he would close all windows for ever, indeed he would construct windows in the manner of the intelligent ancients, so that by no possibility could they be opened. Once he was staying with Dr. R. J. Campbell, who asked how far he was to leave the bedroom window open. ' Shut it tight,' was the instant reply ; ' there are more deaths from fresh air than from all other diseases put together.'

On this point Mrs. Marie Connor Leighton writes : ' He intensely objected to draughts and even to ordinary ventilation, and was wont to say that " fresh air is an invention of the foul fiend." He would aver that he meant to ask the railway companies to seal up the windows of some of their compartments and label those compartments " Foul Air." If they did so, he said, they would be astonished at the rush for carriages thus labelled. He argued that an hour or so spent without so-called fresh air cannot hurt anybody, whereas a few minutes of direct draught between two open windows of a railway carriage may cause you to die of bronchitis or pneumonia. He was essentially an indoor man.' It may be added that he kept a fire blazing in his study almost all the year round.

Writing in 1891 to Mr. J. H. Apted, the *doyen* of the staff of Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, whom Nicoll

described as 'one of my best and truest friends in London,' he put this postscript to the letter :

'My Political Programme.

'1. The Entire Suppression of Ventilation.

'2. The Nationalization of Pencils.'

Small necessary articles like pencils he habitually mislaid. Here is a characteristic confession : 'All my life I have believed in jotting down interesting things that you meet with in your reading ; but, owing to the difficulty of having a pencil and a note-book ready *at the same time*, I have never got beyond one page, and have had to trust my memory entirely for illustrations and references.' He owned to Dr. Hay Fleming : 'I ought never to borrow books. They generally get lost, but this is not my fault. I do not lose them ; they run away of themselves.'

Indeed Nicoll's absent-mindedness became a jest and a byword. Once he came home from Norwich in Dr. Clifford's hat. Again, when he went to Norwich for the Borrow celebration, he returned in Sir Robert Hudson's overcoat. When he stayed with Mr. Lloyd George he brought home Lord Riddell's shoes in his bag. Once he returned from the Bath Club in Mr. Paton's shoes. Another evening he came back from the Reform Club in a hat which belonged to the present Lord Chief Justice.

Nicoll was quite careless about fire, and in his eager talk he would recklessly scatter smoking cigarette-ends and half-extinguished matches. At Mr. Clement Shorter's house in St. John's Wood, which he frequently visited, Mrs. Shorter was on her guard against these risks. But one night, waking in the small hours, she thought she smelt burning. Remembering that Nicoll had spent the evening there, she hurried down to the study, and found that the deep easy chair in which he had been sitting was on fire. It is a kind of miracle that his own house was never burnt down.

His daughter Constance writes of her father : 'Though he would seem languid and absent-minded in regard to many outward happenings, he was always

keen about things literary, always full of hidden energy about his work. He was a great specialist, who cast away superfluities and shut out many delightful pursuits to spend long quiet days in reading—often burrowing in old bound volumes of the *Christian Remembrancer* or the *Spectator*. Concentrated and punctual himself, he was intolerant of excuses from people who did not complete their work up to time. His own days were mapped out beforehand. He would resolutely dictate his articles even though he had a temperature, and would refuse any invitation, however tempting, in order to finish his job. But invitations as a rule did not tempt him ; he disliked going out. And I seem to see him now, lying in bed among his papers and books and saying when I entered the room, " I hope to have a perfectly quiet day to-day—a good day. *Nobody* is coming." '

Yet to correct this picture of a recluse in his own household, let it be added here that Nicoll loved talking nonsense with his children, and making fun for them. His nephew Innes Logan writes : ' He had his father's power of intense solemnity of expression and voice when hatching a joke for a child's entertainment and his own. Our grandfather used in this way to bamboozle us as children entirely, when in his old age we visited him at the Old Manse. Uncle William's visits to our home at Kelso were great events, partly because he had a habit of producing most alluring gifts from the depths of his overcoat pockets. It was a voluminous fur-lined overcoat, which added much to the charm of the proceedings. I remember on one occasion being gravely beckoned into his room as he was unstrapping his portmanteau. I entered, not without anticipation, to find him rummaging among his belongings. At length he found what he wanted, rose, and adjuring me with great solemnity to make good use of so valuable a gift, placed in my hands—a Bible. My heart sank like lead. This wasn't like him. The house was full of Bibles, and in any case to imagine myself reading out of this tome amid the comments of the family—it was too bad ! But out

on the landing I noticed that the Bible rattled : I unhooked the clasp, and opened a huge box of chocolates ! '

Lady Nicoll has supplied some personal notes concerning her husband.

' He drew no hard and fast line between the religious and the secular. For instance, at Bay Tree Lodge when the young people were having songs and music one evening he came into the drawing-room and listened for some time, and then half-startled them by asking them to sing *Rock of Ages*.'

' One afternoon at Mentone in the crowded hall of the Hôtel des Anglais, when a band was playing amid the clatter and chatter of people having tea, our party were busy with writing games. My husband suddenly suggested that each of them should write a poem beginning with the words " If he sleep, he shall do well." The poem [1] he himself wrote appeared in the *British Weekly* of February 16, 1911.'

' He fostered the love of literature in his children, who had the run of his library as soon as they could read. It pleased him when they could supply the context of a quotation, and he liked them to learn poetry by heart. He gave his younger daughter a prize for learning " The Blessed Damozel " when at school. He was always ready to discuss books and authors with them ; but such an excuse as " I haven't had time to read to-day " he invariably received with great derision and scorn.'

By nature and habit Nicoll was a sedentary man. He disliked exercise, and in his later years rarely took any. Probably he never in his life fired a gun or caught a trout. He confessed, ' I took a hatred to gardening because when we were children my father was always sending us into the garden to rake.' Sport and athletics meant nothing to him. It may be doubted whether after his boyhood he enjoyed any kind of game. In 1895, indeed, for some obscure reason, he joined the Neasden Golf Club, apparently with an idea that some day he would take

[1] See Appendix I.

to golf; but his membership was brief, though he used to boast that he had played, or endeavoured to play, one hole. The truth was, Nicoll felt it silly to waste on games time which might be so pleasantly and profitably spent on books. When you lured him to walk over Hampstead Heath, he would talk to you about books and their authors, and would take pains to point out the house on Windmill Hill at which Scott and Wordsworth used to visit Joanna Baillie, or the lodgings where Keats lived in Well Walk, or the house where Tennyson stayed with his widowed mother while he was writing 'In Memoriam,' or the garden at the Spaniards' where Mrs. Bardell and her friends drank tea. Indeed Nicoll cared for places and scenery and buildings mainly because of their associations with literature. He would journey to obscure villages such as Hursley on account of John Keble, and Whatley for the sake of Dean Church, and Hurstmonceaux because of Archdeacon Hare. In company with Mr. Clement Shorter he diligently explored out-of-the-way places where famous writers had lived and died. At Winchester he would ignore the architecture of the cathedral to brood over Jane Austen's grave.

After he had become established at Hampstead, he made it a habit, every six weeks or so, to go down to some town in the country or by the sea and to spend several days at a hotel, where he rested, read, and dictated to a secretary.[1] In this way he visited such places as Eastbourne, Tunbridge Wells, Alton, Guildford, and Ely. He often went to Bath—and more often still to Brighton, where he stayed regularly at the Royal York Hotel. In the spring, and again in the autumn, he would as a rule spend a week or ten days in Paris. Before the War he generally took two or three weeks' holiday quite early each year on the Riviera coast—it might be at Cannes, or Nice, or

[1] His secretary describes how at the Empire Hotel, Bath, he would dictate a long and important article in a large room full of people, with a band playing the whole time. He said that he could not hear the music at all: 'These people are all dead to me. They don't talk to me, and don't expect me to talk to them.'

Antibes, or Bordighera, or Mentone. In August he always went for three or four weeks with his family to his native Aberdeenshire, living in the Old Manse at Lumsden, which he had improved and enlarged and where in the worst of weather he could be happy among his father's books.

Next to reading, Nicoll loved nothing better than good talk. He was himself a most genial, pointed, and delightful talker. He understood how to listen, and he always asked questions. His own conversation was filled with the sap of experience and illustrated from the stores of an amazing memory. In familiar talk he would at times adopt a heightened, not to say sweeping fashion of speech which those who knew him could make allowance for. At first his terse, trenchant judgments would sometimes stagger you. Thus, concerning a certain denomination he declared, 'It 's just a rope of sand.' Of a minister, who had lost some of his former hold on congregations, he said, 'He won't wur-rk.' That was all—but it summed up the situation.

Mr. H. A. Vachell writes[1]: 'Nicoll had a dry, pawky wit. He was well named "Sense and Sensibility." I asked for his opinion upon a lady who had written a book curiously devoid of incident, but convincingly arresting as a human document. He said, slowly, "Aye, she 's juist a pooor insect cr-r-reeping from leaf to leaf." Of a best-seller he remarked, "A too-pretentious wooman." '

One of Nicoll's distinguishing characteristics was that he was an extremely good listener. He used to say, however, that not more than three hours could be profitably spent in talk with even the profoundest and most brilliant person.[2]

'Tell me,' said a lady novelist to him in 1919, 'what kind of books do you think the public will want now after the War?' He bent towards her. 'I don't know,' he answered, 'except this—that they will

[1] See *John o' London's Weekly*, November 3, 1923.

[2] This and the following paragraph are due to the kindness of Mrs. Marie Connor Leighton, the well-known novelist.

always want *good books*. If you do a good book of whatever kind, you need not fear.'

Nicoll was vexed when his daughter did not foresee at once that Mrs. Florence Barclay's books would have a big success: 'Duchesses and hymns!' he said, 'of course the books will sell!'

Mr. Pett Ridge testifies that 'he owned a kind of whimsical frankness. There was critical talk one evening of a well-known Londoner: "He 's a blunderer," agreed Nicoll; "he 's a fool: he 's a mass of astonishing ignorance. But he 's the only friend I have!" At public dinners he occasionally showed restiveness. Himself a good speaker, he endured with a self-sympathetic look on his features the garrulity of those unable to find a peroration. I sat next to him once when a visitor was making a long and prosy reply to the toast of "Literature." Nicoll turned and remarked in a perfectly audible voice: "I always said the man was a bore!"'

On the other hand, Nicoll more than once declared: 'Taking one thing with another, I should be inclined to say that Pett Ridge is the best talker I know—so fresh, so free from side of any sort, so genuinely interested in everything human.' Nicoll used to maintain that the maximum number of good stories a man could carry in his head at one time was about nine, but that Pett Ridge had the gift of Scheherazade and came near the 1001 limit.

Here is another of his judgments: 'Few people express themselves well in talk. The best man for talk, when he is in the mood, is Canton. He expresses it so beautifully.' Nicoll would say of Professor John Adams: 'I love talking to him: John could write a handbook on anything.'

One chief error of Puritanism, according to a keen critic, lay in its neglect of the commandment, 'Anoint thy head and wash thy face.' Notwithstanding the rigour of his Puritan upbringing, Nicoll never soured into an ascetic. His sense of humour kept him free from all pedantry, and without becoming luxurious he escaped being austere. He warmed both hands

at the fire of life in London, and he specially enjoyed the friendly human fellowship to be found in clubs.

Soon after he came up to London Nicoll joined the National Liberal Club, and continued a member until 1895. He was one of the original members of the Bath Club from its foundation in 1895. He joined the Devonshire Club in 1894, and for many years might generally be found there on Wednesdays and Fridays. He joined the Savage Club in 1907, and resigned in 1918. In that year he was elected to the Reform Club, and remained a member until his death.

The Omar Khayyám Club was founded in 1892 and Nicoll became a member four years later. In the summer of 1895 he was a guest at the memorable Omar dinner at Burford Bridge Hotel, after which George Meredith came in to spend an hour or two with the members. For the first time in his life Meredith made a speech, and was followed by Thomas Hardy; the latter confessed that, but for the encouragement which Meredith gave to his earliest book, he would probably not have adopted a literary career.

About 1895 Nicoll was elected a member of the Johnson Club, and for a number of years he frequently took part in its meetings until his membership lapsed in 1918.

Nicoll was admitted to the Whitefriars Club in October 1900. He took a prominent part in many of its Friday evening discussions, often acting as Prior and bringing distinguished visitors as his guests. On one red-letter day in the Club's history the members made pilgrimage to Boxhill, where George Meredith had invited them to tea. Nicoll was Prior that day, and after lunch at Burford Bridge he made a delightful speech in proposing Meredith's health.

A bookman's personal preferences among books not only throw light upon his literary taste but often illustrate the history of his mind. It seems worth while therefore to set down a few of Nicoll's *obiter dicta* on this subject, none the less when they may seem curious and unexpected.

In the early days of the *British Weekly* it published a

series of articles by well-known men on ' Books which have influenced me.' A reader in South Wales wrote in 1887, begging that this series might not close without a contribution from the editor. Nicoll replied from Norwood :

> It would be absurd for so insignificant a person as myself to write about books which have influenced me to an unheeding public. But to you who are so kind as to be interested in the matter I may say, ' A Syrian ready to perish was my father.' George Gilfillan [1] had ten times the influence over me of any other person, though I cannot now read his books much. Since then, I think I have not been powerfully influenced by any writers except the author of ' Mark Rutherford ' and C. W. Banks, the editor of the *Earthen Vessel*. And I should certainly mention Dr. Joseph Parker. You will think this very strange and so it is, but since you asked the question I could only tell the truth or refuse to answer.

Here are two other kindred confessions :

> Lord Lytton was one of the idols of my youth. I read with infinite delight ' The Caxtons,' read it over and over till I could repeat, and even now can repeat, whole pages. I wept at the close of ' Zanoni,' that most ' beautiful and melting close,' as Gilfillan calls it. . . . Still, I held to my belief in him till twenty years ago I read over ' Zanoni ' in Göttingen. It was a blazing August day, and I found a Tauchnitz copy of the book in my hotel. Alas ! the old spell had vanished, and the conclusion no longer moved me. Some days later I read in Pompeii the ' Last Days of Pompeii,' and found it full of life.[2]
>
> Miss Braddon was another of my early idols. ' Lady Audley's Secret ' made an indelible impression upon

[1] In 1909 Nicoll admitted : 'There are many, and the present writer is one, who can never speak of George Gilfillan with judicial impartiality. They cannot think of what he was without remembering what he was to them.'

[2] 'Claudius Clear' in the *British Weekly* of May 28, 1903.

me, and I still think it is one of the best of her productions.[1]

Nicoll used to say that a man who takes a day to read through a book cannot read. His own reading was prodigious in quantity. He declared that he had read every one of James Payn's hundred stories, and read many of them more than once. Great books he would read over and over again. Some years before he died he confessed that he had read Boswell's 'Johnson' through at least twenty times, and Lockhart's 'Scott' at least half a dozen times, and 'Rob Roy' sixty times. For Scott's novels his admiration was unbounded. 'I owe more to Scott than to any other writer—the Scottish gentleman who gave to all generations a host of immortal friends. Every year even in the busiest times I have read over his best stories.' To Nicoll they appeared, as Hazlitt said, like a new edition of human nature. 'When I had influenza I used to get "Rob Roy" and a volume of Spurgeon's Sermons, because I knew that I could always read them however high my temperature was. My own favourite of Scott is "Rob Roy."'

'Of all the great books of humour there is none, to my mind, at all comparable with Pickwick.'[2]

He wrote to Dr. Denney in 1893: 'I have gone through "Clarissa Harlowe" with much profit—the best novel I have ever read, or, I should say, the greatest.' Writing from Paris in 1900 he told his wife, 'I am reading "Robert Falconer" and admire it more than ever.' Here is another confession: 'The novel that gave me most pleasure is "Shirley." My poem of poems is Christina Rossetti's "Too Late" in the "Prince's Progress." It came out originally in *Macmillan*, where I learnt it before she altered it.'

In his maturer years Nicoll turned with peculiar pleasure and relief to some of Goethe's prose writings —'Wilhelm Meister' and 'Elective Affinities.' Notwithstanding their discursiveness and sentimentality

[1] Letter to her son, Mr. W. B. Maxwell, in July 1921.

[2] He used to laugh and say, 'I know Pickwick far better than I know the Bible, which is a pity.'

he found in these books a certain tranquil depth and noble acceptance—qualities which 'make Goethe's genius appear to the mind which bathes in it like the healing waters of an enchanted lake.' He wrote in 1900 : 'I have re-read much of Goethe. I did not admire him more, simply because that was impossible, but all the old reverence and gratitude returned. Will it not be said at the end of the new century that the greatest writer of this past century, the greatest beyond comparison, was Goethe ?'

In appraising authors Nicoll always insisted upon the mysterious elemental distinction between genius and talent. He recognized that we have many gifted novelists, with imagination and insight and style and dramatic power. Yet 'a man of very high talent may write a book which is a model of all the canons ; but if that light golden flame which we call genius does not play upon its pages, the book will not live. Whereas the writer of genius remains and endures, and men will come to him again and again.' Nicoll always counted Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, Rudyard Kipling and J. M. Barrie as among the English writers of genius in his own time.

As he advanced in life some of his friends felt that Nicoll became more conservative in tastes and ideas—as so often happens with age. It was a more serious flaw that, as he succeeded, he grew too fond of successful men. His elder daughter admits, 'I think we were brought up to consider unsuccessful people as not much worth knowing.' In his heart her father believed that substantially all failure is due either to stupidity or to indolence. He once told the students at a theological college : 'Those who fail are the shirkers and the men who work spasmodically. Nearly every one is clever enough to succeed, but comparatively few have the untiring energy by the exercise of which at all times, and almost to the limit of possibility, the victory is gained.' He had a defiant confidence in what men can do if they try with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. His nephew[1] writes : 'He

[1] The Rev. Innes Logan.

seemed really incapable of appreciating a man who was not successful, and unready to recognize that some high quality might have been the hindrance. No doubt there were exceptions to this hard attitude ; but it was, nevertheless, his usual attitude. And it made him many enemies.'

When Henry Ward Beecher heard of a certain American who had died without having made a single enemy, the orator flamed out : ' That man ought to have been dead and rotten years ago.' At any rate, no controversialist worth his salt, if he be formidable as well as sincere, can escape making enemies. No journalist with strong convictions and an incisive pen can work for five and thirty years as a London editor without arousing many antipathies and animosities—by his virtues as well as by his faults. Nicoll while he lived met with a full share of hostile criticism. Doubtless he expected it, and at times he may have provoked it or deserved it. But he took it generally in a half-amused, half-contemptuous spirit, without much discomposure. And assuredly he went down to his grave unembittered by rankling resentments.

The meanest of God's creatures, as Browning puts it, boasts two soul-sides. One to face the world with : ' Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you.' But there is also the other side—the ' silent silver lights and darks undreamed of '—which only friends discover and any understand.

In his essay on ' The Literary Character ' Hazlitt recorded a cynical judgment : ' Literary men are not attached to the persons of their friends but to their minds. They look upon them in the same light as on the books in their library, and read them till they are tired.' Of Nicoll, at any rate, this was emphatically not true. He had deep stores of affection, and he drew round him a host of friends linked to himself by personal fondness and sympathy. Thus for Robert Neil, the companion of his young college days, he preserved a passionate regard, and if his children went up to Cambridge he would tell them to be sure and look at the window of Neil's old rooms over

Pembroke gateway. Alexander Rust and William M'Robbie, his early class-mates in theology, held their unchallenged places in his heart until he died. With Marcus Dods and with James Denney he kept in close and constant fellowship by years of correspondence, as this biography bears witness. For J. M. Barrie, he reserved a friendship of rare quality, and when Nicoll talked of him it was with a sort of tender pride. For Lloyd George his affectionate admiration never faltered. While men as diverse as Joseph Parker and John Watson and Maarten Maartens and Clement Shorter and James Moffatt and John Adams each held a special place in his regard.

Another close friend of thirty years' standing was Horace Morgan, about whom Nicoll wrote : ' He fits me like a pair of old and comfortable slippers.' They drew together in strong personal attachment and often took holiday trips in company. Horace Morgan made himself one of the kindest and most serviceable of helpers in Nicoll's practical affairs. Morgan's uncle, the late Mr. Harvey Orrinsmith,[1] was a man whom Nicoll also very greatly valued, spending for years each Saturday afternoon with him at Hampstead.

Somewhere about 1900 Nicoll formed a community of intimates—Horace Morgan, Stuart Paton, and George Riddell, who for over twenty years were accustomed to dine together on Wednesday nights, generally at the Devonshire Club, where now and then they would entertain some distinguished guests. Later on, Hedley Le Bas and Robert Donald were added to the group, which was dubbed by Nicoll ' The Presbytery,' he being the ' Moderator.' Here is one of his admonitions to a truant :

HAMPSTEAD, *Oct.* 16, 1912.

Your depraved and sinful conduct in absenting yourself from the Presbytery deserves the severest

[1] In earlier life Mr. Orrinsmith had been the pupil and partner of J. W. Linton, the engraver, and the friend of men like Mazzini, Leigh Hunt, John Leech, Sydney Dobell, and Professor De Morgan. After he died, in 1904, Nicoll wrote in the *Hampstead Annual* a long and beautiful tribute to his character.

censure. You do not know what you have lost. I have been a good deal about during this week, and am brimming with pointed and valuable anecdotes. However, I have postponed my visit to Brighton, and shall be at the Presbytery next Wednesday, expecting to see you in dust and ashes.

The Presbytery outlasted the War, and died only about a year before its Moderator.

Many other friends there were whose names rise up for record—women like Miss Beatrice Harraden and Mrs. Burnett Smith, for whom he had real affection, and last, but not least, Ernest Hodder-Williams, to whom he felt almost as to a son. But it is not possible to mention a tithe of the people whom Nicoll cared for with deep and genuine regard. Mr. James Milne [1] has truly characterized ' this " canny " Scotsman who, to those whom he liked, could be the simplest friend in the world and one of the best friends.'

In order to illustrate Nicoll's genius for friendship it may be permissible here to quote a few sentences from his friends' letters.

There was a proposal in 1900 that Nicoll and J. M. Barrie should go away on another journey together. The latter wrote : ' It would be a splendid time undoubtedly, but outside the holiday of it I question whether I could turn it to much profitable account. What I feel is that it would probably do you a vast deal of good, and that would be a great inducement to me to go, while this also is certain, that I would rather go a long holiday with you than with any other man in the world.'

Ian Maclaren wrote to Nicoll in 1901 : ' I regard our friendship as one of the good gifts of God in my life, and I trust that I may ever be loyal to it and be at your service when you have any need of me in the straits of life, even as you have helped me.'

In a letter from The Pines, Putney Hill, dated November 4, 1901, Theodore Watts-Dunton spoke of ' the thousand and one inestimable services for which

[1] Of the *Graphic*.

I am indebted to you. I have suffered so many losses of dear friends during the last ten years that I prize a new friendship like yours more than a man of your age, perhaps, can fully understand. When, in my introduction to " Aylwin " I alluded to " the new friends " the book had brought round me, you were, I am sure, the chief of those new friends I had in my mind.'

Two years later, Watts-Dunton wrote again : ' What a powerful and loyal friend you have been to me ! I often think that what little reputation I have I owe very largely to you, and it is a great regret of mine that I see your face so rarely.'

In similar vein George Riddell wrote in 1913 : ' My friendship with you has been, and is, one of the greatest pleasures and honours of my life, and I often think that I have learned more from you than I have done from any one else.' A letter from Robert Donald in 1916 declared : ' I value your friendship more than I can say.' When ' Toby, M.P.' wrote to W. R. N., he would often begin playfully ' My dear Wren.'

To these we may append a significant confession of ' Claudius Clear ' :[1] ' If I were to covet any honour of authorship it would be this—that some letters of mine might be found in the desks of my friends when their life struggle is ended.'

After Nicoll's death Dr. R. J. Campbell wrote :[2] ' Estrangement never modified in the slightest degree my admiration of Sir William's prodigious ability, and, as time went on, respect for the sincerity and depth of his religious convictions. He was an amazing man. He could and did live in half a dozen worlds at once. He had all the hardness of his Aberdonian rock and all the kindness of that Scottish heart which—as Ian Maclaren used to say—is at bottom the tenderest in the world. He was a curious mixture of the practical, the ruthless, the devout, and even the mystical.'

Moreover, beyond most editors, Nicoll had a host of invisible friends scattered up and down the world. Throughout half his life he had been preaching to a

[1] 'The Day Book of Claudius Clear,' p. 151.
[2] In the *Church Family Newspaper* of May 11, 1923.

vast congregation whose faces he could never see. Again and again, however, they spoke to him by letters. We may venture to quote a few of the numberless messages which reached him from readers unknown and out of sight.

From Glasgow :

'I am a clerk, and a person of no consequence, but I thank you for bringing more good things into my life than any other living man.'

From a Somersetshire village :

'I have been confined to bed for many months and fear I shall never be a well man again, as I am nearly 75 years of age. My object in writing to you is to tell you with what delight your valuable paper is read here in my sick chamber, and the comfort derived therefrom is incalculable. I am as deaf as a post, so that conversation with friends is quite out of the question. I am only a retired village postman, with no money to spare for new books, so that your intensely interesting paper is a perfect godsend when it comes—like a ray of sunshine into a dark place. There is no village library here for the loan of fresh books wherewith to solace the weary hours of a sick chamber, hence the keen delight with which the *British Weekly* is received every week. Please pardon the garrulity of an old man who is obliged to write left-handed, having lost his right arm more than fifty years ago while serving in the Royal Navy.'

From a Scotswoman in Dundee :

'I have lived a hard strenuous life, and I never could have maintained my high courage had it not been for the help got from the *British Weekly*.'

From St. Anne's-on-the-Sea, Lancashire :

'I started to read the *British Weekly* when I was a newspaper boy of twelve, simply because it happened to come to my hands, and this gave me the taste for forming my own library and also led me on later to read contributions by writers in the press you referred to. You were my Shepherd as far as reading matter is concerned. My actual education was very scanty, and I can safely say, without any exaggeration, that I

went to the *British Weekly* school. I doubt whether I have missed a single copy of the *British Weekly* for over twenty years; the Claudius Clear articles are my weekly feast.'

From a young man in Edinburgh:

'I am altogether unknown to you, and in all probability you will never see or hear of me in this world, but I take the privilege of calling you my friend, because your words have had more influence upon me for good than those of any living writer. It is no exaggeration to say that my life—like the lives of scores of other young men—has been in no small measure moulded by the precepts which have fallen from your pen.'

When Nicoll received the C.H. in 1921, an unknown correspondent wrote from Kent:

'Permit a country minister to send one word of sincere congratulations on the honour which will give joy to your countless unknown friends all over the world. When a "Tommy" in the army I read the *British Weekly* on the ruins of Babylon and on the banks of the Tigris. It kept many of us from moral suicide.'

Among human virtues by no means least is the virtue which answers letters. 'Matthew Arnold had the reputation of being supercilious, and he did something to deserve it. But I have had occasion to see at one time or another many letters written by Arnold to very humble authors, long letters too, answering with delicate courtesy the questions put to him and criticizing carefully. For this one cannot help loving Arnold. A still more remarkable instance was that of Charles Dickens, who, in the very height of his strenuous life, found time to write long letters of encouragement to contributors who showed any sign of promise.'[1] It may be added that Nicoll himself showed immense kindness in answering letters innumerable from people quite unknown to him. He would take extraordinary pains to reply to their questions and to give them the advice they so often sought.

No biography can record the best portion of a good man's life—his little, nameless, unremembered acts of

[1] 'Claudius Clear' in 'Letters on Life,' p. 150.

kindness and of love. One example may be quoted here. After her husband's death Lady Nicoll received this touching tribute from Mr. J. M. Legge, who had been the foreman printer of the *British Weekly* at Messrs. Wymans :

'For some years I have been the privileged printer responsible to Sir William for the putting together in type that wonderful paper of his. I therefore came into contact with him at the lower end of a great newspaper, but he was so appreciative of any little act that the printer rendered him that it was always a pleasure to work for him. He was the kindest of editors, and gave the printer little or no trouble, while he made you realize that he was pleased with every effort you made to supply him with the necessary proofs, etc. But more of his kindness was to be mine. Through ill-health I had to give up, and one of Sir William's last acts of kindness was (although so ill himself) to help me to secure a Printers' Pension. I do hope that he was well enough to have read my letter of thanks.'

With all his love for books, Nicoll never lost touch with common human beings. He had mastered betimes the catholic lesson which a lad may learn by going to school with all the ploughboys in the parish. And in his day Aberdeen University had at least this cardinal virtue, that it did not breed snobs. In rural Scotland, moreover, a young minister mixes on equal terms with all sorts and conditions of men. So after he came to London it was not difficult for Nicoll to preserve his vivid interest in ordinary persons. He had a fellow feeling for people of whatever class.[1] Indeed, one secret of his success as a writer lay in his power to project himself instinctively into the place of his readers. He could so envisage the various types of folk who read the *British Weekly*, and could so enter into their experience, that what he wrote for them found its way home to their minds and hearts.

[1] In 1906, for example, he wrote to his wife from a hotel at Tunbridge Wells, sympathizing with the head-waiter, who had complained bitterly because certain officers would not treat waiters like human beings.

This power of detached sympathy gives a clue to his many-sided nature, and explains how so often he became all things to all men. This it was which made it possible for him to move on different planes 'with a subtlety for which casuistry is far too coarse a word.' On one plane he could be intensely shrewd and practical, alive to the ideas as well as the sales which animate journalism, reading and praising books which make a big popular appeal, mixing freely and hopefully among men of the world with whom he had ultimately no real affinity. But apart and aloof from all these lay a different region where Nicoll withdrew to be at home with himself and with the things he prized most and loved best. He found strength to endure the strain of incessant labour because he possessed a refuge beyond outside worries and weariness. He exemplified his own favourite doctrine of the Inner Room.

To say thus much, however, falls short of unravelling all the strands in a complex character. The abysmal deeps of personality hide their own secret which we have no skill to explore. Nicoll felt this when he wrote :

'Every human soul is a mystery to the soul that knows it best, and should, therefore, be held sacred. Clouds and darkness are round about it. You may spend hours of every day for years with one whose innermost thought you have never once surprised. Even the child on the street who runs your message lives in a world to which you have no entrance. What one knows of himself should teach him how little he knows of other people ; should deliver him from too much dependence on their judgments, whether favourable or unfavourable. They cannot judge, because they do not know.

> I am not so good as I seem,
> Yet I seem not so good as I am.'

# CHAPTER XXX

## THE LAST PHASE

Nicoll's active career culminated and, for practical purposes, almost closed on his seventieth birthday. He lived on, however, for eighteen months longer, doing less and less work as he grew physically weaker.

In October 1921 he went for a fortnight to Brighton, where he caught influenza and returned home ill. Five doctors met for consultation at Bay Tree Lodge in November, and he was forbidden to dictate more than about a page for any number of the *British Weekly*. The letters which follow often reflect his feeble state of health.

Early in November Nicoll published his last book, which was entitled 'Princes of the Church.' The volume contained thirty-four biographical tributes to notable Christian leaders—Anglicans, Free Churchmen, and Roman Catholics—in these islands, which he had written for the columns of the *British Weekly* between 1888 and 1921.

*To Mrs. Forsyth.*

[On the death of her husband, Principal P.T. Forsyth, after many months of illness.]

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *Nov.* 19, 1921.

So your dear husband has now gone up the shining road! How happy you must be that you were able to be like an angel to him through all the strain. How happy he was in your care and keeping. You will be comforted in knowing what a great and strong regard was entertained for him among his own people, and indeed throughout the whole Christian world.

The *British Weekly* of November 17 contained a leading article in which Nicoll laid his own wreath on the grave of this subtle and profound theological thinker.

*To Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Dec.* 17, 1921.

What I specially wish to thank you for, and to thank you with a whole heart, is your incessant kindness to me during the year. I have been a tax on that kindness very unwillingly, but you have behaved like a big angel and met me at every turn with words of comfort and reassurance and with actual deeds of great generosity, which, believe me, I do not at all fail to understand though I may not say much about it. I feel that I have now entered a new period in life with strength considerably impaired. But yet I think there is a little work in me left and a hope of partial recovery. I have got good from the massage though I shall never be quite clear of the neuritis, they tell me. The other trouble is a continual cough—not so bad during the day but very bad at night, and breaking my sleep. I have had a fairly hard time, and it would have been much harder if it had not been for your assiduous and tender kindness. I do not suppose I shall get up for some time or go down to London, but I will go down as soon as I can, and in the meantime I will do as much work as the doctors allow me. I do not feel any dimness in my mind.

You have done magnificently and shown yourself a really great business man in the year we have passed through, and I am sure neither of us forgets the many mercies of the time. Life is always a fight. Unbroken sunshine never lasts long and it is well that it should not. But I think you have in many ways been most fortunate, and I shall look forward eagerly to seeing you when you return. I have not been seeing many people because I find that it taxes me too much. The more intimate a friend is, the more I feel this. But on the whole I get a little

better and hope to be quite able to sit in my study and see my friends by the time you return from Brighton.

Early in January 1922 Nicoll wrote to Miss Stoddart, the assistant-editor of the *British Weekly* : ' You have had a very heavy time with my illness, and you have borne the burden with the utmost bravery. I have not yet given up hope that we shall meet again at Wymans.' [1]

In the same month he wrote to Professor Stalker, of Aberdeen : ' I am sure you will bear up against the burden of the years far better than I, but I am getting benefit from massage and doing a fair amount of work —and waiting.'

*To the Rev. William Roberts.*

HAMPSTEAD, *March* 15, 1922.

I am deeply indebted to you for your most kind and encouraging letter. Your words have strengthened me. I have been for weeks practically confined to my room with neuritis, and it is not a pleasant experience. But when messages of cheer and friendship come in, as they are always doing, they make a great consolation.

*To Miss E. T. Maclaren.*

HAMPSTEAD, *April* 21, 1922.

I have been confined all the winter to the house with neuritis, for which I get massage, and have done a fair amount of work, but it is a tiresome business. However, I must not expect much—I am past seventy now.

*To Mr. James Milne.*

HAMPSTEAD, *April* [24], 1922.

It was most kind of you to write, and I thank you heartily. I have been working at great disadvantage since my seventieth birthday, having collapsed with

[1] The printers, at whose office the paper was passed for press.

neuritis, and I have scarcely been out of my room for six months. I have not been out [of doors] at all. I do some thousands of words a week, however, with great difficulty and reluctance.

Sir J. M. Barrie, who had been elected Lord Rector of St. Andrews, arranged to deliver his Rectorial address to the University early in May. Nicoll was invited to be present, and to receive an honorary LL.D. on that occasion. To his keen disappointment, however, the state of his health made it impossible for him to attend. He confessed, ' This is the only function I ever regretted being absent from.'

*To Principal Irvine*, St. Andrews.

HAMPSTEAD, *April* 25, 1922.

It is superlatively generous in you to think it possible to have the Degree conferred on me in absence, as you have generously decided to do in the case of Mr. Thomas Hardy and Sir Sidney Colvin. This would gratify me intensely, for in addition to its other advantages it would connect me in a manner with the occasion. When I remember how Barrie used to talk about the Scottish students and about his climbing the ladder, I feel that I ought to be beside him in the great day of his pride.

HAMPSTEAD, *May* 5, 1922.

I had a very kind letter from the Rector, and I have written one in reply and addressed it to your care. There is nothing much in it, but it conveys my anxious wishes for a perfect triumph.

Mrs. Irvine will perhaps be interested to know that the letter from St. Andrews reached us here on the morning of our silver wedding day. This gave great pleasure to us both.

*To Sir J. M. Barrie.*

HAMPSTEAD, *May* 5, 1922.

MY DEAR BARRIE,—It was most kind of you to write me. I had set my heart on being among your

audience on an occasion which will be, I am sure, historical. But I have been six months confined to the house with neuritis, and am not yet strong enough to venture on the long journey to St. Andrews. This has been a bitter grief to me, but it cannot be helped. I wish you the utmost success and I do not think you need have any fear of not being heard. The Principal is evidently a splendid man, and has written me most kind and charming letters. He kindly asked me to be his guest along with you, and I should have enjoyed that more than I can say.

The Senatus have decided to confer on me the degree of LL.D. in absence, which is very gracious. I think they are doing the same for Sidney Colvin and Thomas Hardy. I trust, my dear friend, that you will be brought well through this trying ordeal, and I shall be most interested to hear your impressions when you come back.

Ever yours affectionately,
W. R. N.

*To the Rev. W. A. Leslie Elmslie.*

HAMPSTEAD, *May* 8, 1922.

I have had a strange time this winter. I have got neuritis, and I have had to go to bed and practise massage, and I have done so now for more than six months, I think. On the whole I am a little better, but very feeble. I do about five thousand words a week, dictating, but it takes me all my time. I was obliged to refrain from going to St. Andrews to see Barrie made Lord Rector, but I believe they are conferring the LL.D. degree on me in absence, which is very kind of them. I see very few people and am easily tired. But I should be delighted to see you, and I would not feel nervous with you.

Later in the same month Mr. Elmslie was appointed Professor of Hebrew at Westminster College, Cambridge. When he heard this news Nicoll exclaimed : ' If he had been my own son I couldn't have been better pleased.'

After his return from St. Andrews, Sir J. M. Barrie paid Nicoll a visit on May 15 and gave him a report of the proceedings. The letter which follows, written to an unknown correspondent, records the impression :

> What a wonderful success the whole Barrie business was ! He came up to my sick-room on Saturday evening and described all the pilgrimages he had gone through. What struck me was the absence of a single jarring note and the perfect understanding of the whole reception. He was very enthusiastic about the University authorities.

A little later came a presentation copy of the Lord Rector's address on ' Courage,' inscribed ' To W. R Nicoll, from his affectionate friend J. M. Barrie, June 1922.' It was acknowledged in the following terms :

> HAMPSTEAD, *June* 1922.
>
> MY DEAR FRIEND,—It made me very proud and very happy to receive your beautiful book—beautiful in every way, and with an inscription which could never be excelled in my experience. What a long journey we have had together ! and if the end for me is approaching yet I look back on the past with great thankfulness, and one of the most thankworthy things is my association with you, which has always been a source of much happiness and pride to me, and which is crowned by your gift.
>
> Ever yours affectionately,
>
> W. R. N.

In May another consultation of doctors had recommended that their patient should take three months' rest in Aberdeenshire, and he was moved from Hampstead to Lumsden in the middle of June.

At this point it seems fitting to say something about the helper who mainly sustained the burden of the *British Weekly* during Nicoll's long illness. He had known Miss Jane T. Stoddart intimately, ever since in her girlhood she attended his Bible class at Kelso. After studying in Germany she joined his staff in

London in October 1890, and soon became his chief assistant. Eight years later he wrote : ' Her help has been invaluable. There is no branch of journalism in which she is not an adept, and no subject on which she cannot write with skill and knowledge. She has been the most loyal and helpful of coadjutors.' As time went on, this accomplished and scholarly woman grew even more efficient. In several of Nicoll's books the preface acknowledges her collaboration. Her services to the *Woman at Home* have been already mentioned. On the *British Weekly* she was the permanent assistant-editor, and ' Lorna ' became a household word among its readers. She also contributed to its columns not a few series of very able articles on special subjects.[1] It was indeed fortunate for Nicoll that he possessed a lieutenant with such knowledge, judgment, and experience, whom he could leave in charge as his deputy. During the summer months of 1922 Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams also took a leading part in conducting the paper. When we state that after Nicoll's seventieth birthday he himself wrote only five or six leading articles, it will be seen that the task of carrying on the *British Weekly* was no easy problem ; but thanks to Miss Stoddart it was solved, and solved with wonderful success.

It was as an invalid that Nicoll set his face to visit Lumsden for the last time. Men who travel far from the village where they were cradled yield to the magic spell which draws them back. They look upon the hills and streams of their boyhood as friends which grow dearer with time. As life goes on and is enriched by new experiences, they return to see deeper meanings in the familiar landscape and people. Nothing delighted Nicoll more than to get back to his native county. His soul had a secret chamber, and on its hearth there was always smouldering an Aberdeenshire peat-fire. It was in the Old Manse at Lumsden that you saw him at his very best—happy, hospitable,

[1] Some of these series were revised and reprinted in such volumes as 'The New Socialism : An Impartial Enquiry' (1909) ; 'The Referendum' (1910) ; 'The Case Against Spiritualism' (1919).

expansive, and at home. You were reminded of what Tom Moore wrote after his visit to Sir Walter : ' I parted from Scott with the feeling that all the world might admire him in his works, but that those only could learn to love him as he deserved who had seen him at Abbotsford.'

Nicoll had a profound and unquenchable love for Lumsden. ' I remember,' writes his nephew, ' in the summer of 1911, walking with him round by the old peat moss. At one point he stopped, and stood for some minutes gazing at the village smoking on the rise above us, immobile except for the long fingers delicately smoothing his moustache and chin. He brooded long over the view, said " Aye, an upland village " in a tone of the deepest affection, and then abruptly resumed his way.'

Very pleased he would be, as often as August came round, to motor among the hills purple with ' dear heather,' reciting to his companions favourite Scottish poems with a rhythmic lilt in his soft, crooning voice. Perhaps it is not altogether fanciful to imagine that ' the spiritual colour of Scotland, like the local colour of so many Scottish moors, is a purple that in some lights can look like grey.'

Lady Nicoll writes of her husband : ' He was specially happy spending that long summer of 1922 in his old home. The golden broom on the hill-sides and the scented lilacs which his father had planted in the little manse garden gave him great delight. He reminded us that he had not seen those lilacs in blossom since he was a lad of fourteen, as from that date onward he had always been away from Lumsden when summer began.'

*To Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

THE OLD MANSE, LUMSDEN, *Aug.* 21, 1922.

I cannot say how much indebted I am to you for your admirable work on the paper, and your no less admirable work on the MSS. Your letters have been very kind and very cheering. I think the time has come for me to tell you exactly where I stand.

I am certainly a little better. All my friends say so, and I feel it. The neuritis is still pretty bad, and I have difficulty in moving about. But I took a walk on Saturday of fully half a mile, I think, and was not materially the worse for it. I have great difficulty in getting into carriages and out of them. I think I am quite clear-minded, and my memory is good. So I propose to stay here, with your approval, so long as I think this air is doing me good, then come back to resume my work slowly, and we shall see what we shall see. I am always most willing, as you know, to make any arrangement that may be best in the interest of the firm and the paper, and I am not in the least afraid that there will be any dispute between us, except that you may want to give me too much.

I think you manage the *B.W.* extremely well. In fact, it has never been better than it is now. I should like to take a greater part, but I must go by my strength, which is small, and after all an editor of seventy looks like an anachronism.

When Lord Northcliffe died in August, Nicoll was able to dictate a memorial article on that remarkable man, with whom he had come into close and cordial touch during the War. He considered that among the enigmatic personalities of his time hardly any presented such strangely interesting problems as Lord Northcliffe and—on quite a different level—Horatio Bottomley. He wrote from Lumsden to Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams : ' Bottomley has been well handled, and you do get a glimpse of him ; but there was a side of Northcliffe of which I have only seen chinks and crevices.'

*To Professor John Adams.*

[After the death of G. R. Sims.]

LUMSDEN, *Sept.* 1922.

Poor Dagonet ! We were on very friendly terms as long as he and I were members of the Devonshire,

but when I went down to the Reform I lost him, for which I am sorry, for he had a really kind heart and was a good man. He was one of those Christians who will be astonished by being told at last that they were Christians and that what they had done to the poor they had done to Christ. But he persisted in his activities to the end—largely without success.

At the beginning of October, Nicoll returned from his home in Aberdeenshire to Hampstead for the last time. It was Edmund Waller who desired to die ' where he was first roused.' That instinct lies rooted deep in human nature, and it is perhaps nowhere stronger than among Scotsmen. Nicoll fiercely loved the Old Manse at Lumsden, and thought of it when he lay dying, and would fain have gone back there at the last, if only he could have taken his doctor with him.

Very little has been said in these pages about the more intimate side of Nicoll's domestic life. His biographer holds the old-fashioned belief that on such sacred personal details reticence is due both to the living and to the dead. Here, however, one sentence may be permitted of homage to the lady who crowned so many years of affection and devotion by her tireless, ceaseless care of her husband during the long painful months before his departure. She poured out the spikenard of love and patience without stint to the very end.

Premonitions of an approaching exodus appear in Nicoll's few remaining letters. In October he wrote to Dr. Greville MacDonald, who was engaged in writing the life of his father, George MacDonald : ' As to the most important point of your letter, *now* is the accepted time. Let the book be published next year, at the latest. Don't wait for 1924. I don't believe I shall be alive in 1924, and I wish to see your book.' Nicoll read the first half of ' George MacDonald and his Wife ' before it was in print, though he did not survive to read the second half. But he sent word to the author that he believed that it would prove ' one of the

fullest records of a victorious faith in the whole history of the Christian Church.'

*To Mr. Clement K. Shorter.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Oct.* 13, 1922.

They all tell me I am much better, but I feel the neuritis still, and it restricts my action. I hope to arrange for our meeting in a comparatively short time now, when I have nothing extra pressing me. I am sure you could tell me a great deal that would be very interesting and very instructive to me. How interesting life is still !

I am pleased to hear about your wife and daughter. I have just got another grandchild from my daughter Mildred, so I have four grandchildren now, and I believe they are all promising. . . .

I can walk half a mile under extreme pressure.

*To Miss Nan Hastings.*

[On the death of her father, Dr. James Hastings, editor of the *Expository Times*.]

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Oct.* 17, 1922.

I cannot say how much I was shocked and grieved by the most sad and unexpected news. The blow seemed to come very near. I never expected it, for when he kindly came to see us off at Aberdeen three weeks ago he looked very well, though thin. He was full of energy, and we could have talked for hours if the train had not been ready to start.

I have tried to put a few things together for the *British Weekly* but am not yet very well and find it difficult. He was a wonderful man—more wonderful than people thought, or than he allowed them to think. What a fertile mind, and what iron and continuous industry ! For my part I have had work enough, and would gladly find an excuse to burrow in some quiet place. But we must take the way appointed for us.

*To Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams.*

BAY TREE LODGE, FROGNAL, HAMPSTEAD,
*Nov.* 11, 1922.

MY BELOVED FRIEND,—I am very sorry to hear that you have been so unwell, but I hope that you have taken the illness in time, and that by obeying rules —the same as I am—you will gather strength. I am wearying to see you again. What splendid, magnificent work you have done ! What splendid, magnificent work you will yet do ! I hope I shall be there to see some of it.

Any time would suit me for seeing you. Perhaps the afternoon is best. Take any day in the week. I scarcely leave my room. How glad I shall be to look on your kind face again.

Ever, with great affection,
W. ROBERTSON NICOLL.

*To Lord Riddell.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Dec.* 5, 1922.

I am writing to you a business letter which is also a personal letter. I want your votes for a Printers' Pension for Mr. J. M. Legge, of Wymans, who has acted as foreman printer of the *British Weekly* for many years, and very efficiently, and is now a victim of tuberculosis. In all my connexion with the printing trade, which has not been small, I know no better man. You are not to toss this into the waste-paper basket as merely one of the usual requests. You must carry through the matter, or my spirit will haunt you.

*To Dr. Hay Fleming.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Dec.* 16, 1922.

I am still bothered with neuritis and not able to do more than half my former work—but I am seventy-one now.

Sir William Robertson Nicoll, c.h.
and Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams, c.v.o.
July 19, 1921

A. Rust W. R. Nicoll W. McRobbie
At Lumsden, August 9, 1922

*To the Rev. W. M'Robbie.*

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *Feb.* 10, 1923.

During this memorable last year you have been much in my mind. The long journey begun so many years ago has in a manner brought us nearer together, and I am sure that we shall find that if we ever meet again we can talk.

I am very sorry to hear that you have had such a poor winter. As for me, I have many reasons for being thankful, but my strength does not increase. It has been a trying winter and a good winter, but I have stayed in my room and known little about things. The addition of influenza to my burdens very nearly wiped me out, for I had really no strength to spare. I have read a good deal and done a fair amount of work. But of course I am not equal to the whole job. I am hoping, however, to write my 'Claudius' this week. I feel quite calm in my mind, although aware that my life is limited and precarious. I do not suffer much from pain. Every one is very kind to me, and my thoughts are mostly taken up with my own people, among whom I shall always reckon you as one.

I would like you to write to me when you have the leisure how you feel in regard to the eternal future. My own feeling used to be one of great unworthiness and consequent fear; but, rightly or wrongly, since I became so ill I have looked back rather with complacency than otherwise about my work. I have felt that for a great number of years I have laboured hard and that I could not have done much more however I had tried. Now how do you feel? I suppose both feelings can rightly find room in our minds.

I am still, as always, firmly impressed by the strength of the Christian faith, and I have a humble hope that I am a man who has done his best work and is entitled to quiet. I cannot do much in the way of writing, but I will write to you if you will write to me. My good secretary understands.

There are some things I could say more frankly to you than to any other human being.

There is a great deal of confusion with the threat of a printers' strike in London. My feeling is that I have fought this battle over and over again for a period of forty years, and others will have to fight it now. I am quite unable to attend meetings or make speeches. You got my last public speech.

Twenty years earlier, when Hugh Price Hughes passed away in his prime, Nicoll told the London Wesleyan ministers, 'We should perhaps be far more afraid of living too long than of dying too soon.' His own final illness began in the middle of January 1923. During February and March his weakness sensibly increased, and he continued his much-diminished work with great difficulty. It is bare justice to record that Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton treated him throughout with most generous and considerate kindness. The letter which follows describes the happy arrangement—suggested by Nicoll himself—whereby he remained nominal editor of the *British Weekly* to the end, while the Rev. J. M. E. Ross was associated with him as co-editor from the beginning of April.

*To Professor John Adams.*

[Who was then lecturing at Los Angeles, California.]

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *March* 2, 1923.

My beloved Friend,—Well, I have got through the winter so far, and there are signs of spring in the air. You have been awfully good with your letters. I have read them with the greatest interest and am always constructing pictures. Alas, none of these give you back to me, and I must do the best I can. I have had no substitute of any kind. The fact is I have had a pretty poor winter owing to various complaints, and I do not know what my prospect is. But I love to think of your triumphal progress and the welcome accorded to you. It is another proof

of the perspicacity and the perspicuity of the American spirit.

I read also with a sort of mild envy the account of your sunshine. It is well that there should be places of that kind, and there was a day when I should have liked the sight and the journey, though I see the journey is still a very long one.

You will instruct as well as be instructed. I mean, you will learn a great deal from this great young America—for after all a hundred years is nothing. I am nearly a hundred myself, and no wiser than I used to be and weaker. I was much struck by the dignity with which your friends treated the drink problem. If the Americans can stick to this, they will show themselves capable of any greatness that awaits them. If, on the other hand, they fall back into the care of the publicans, it will discourage every aspiration towards better things.

I have a good deal in the way of news to tell you about myself, because I know you would much rather hear it from me, and I think so would my friend Mrs. Adams.

Being exceedingly worn out, I gave in my resignation of my office at Hodder & Stoughton's. I felt that I could not be responsible even for the reduced amount of work which I do, and it was like a troublesome weight upon me, especially at night, which I abhor. They behaved, you will be glad to hear, with great kindness and affection, and I think I may say the same about the whole staff. There are many questions which rise up, and they may be treated in a wrong way. If the people are willing to do the right thing, all will be well. At least we have met with no barrier yet—though we may, of course. . . . Miss Stoddart behaved very well, and so did every one, in short. I hold my place still, my resignation not being accepted, but I mean to carry this through. I feel that I must have a few months' lease of absolute quietness and no work at all. I have great difficulty in keeping the matter out of the papers, but have been fairly successful.

I expect that I shall be contributing more or less regularly for some few months. We have engaged the Rev. J. M. E. Ross to fill my place. It was all done with extreme pleasantness and I think it will be a success. He has shown the right spirit about the thing, and I will help him to the utmost of my power. I am also anxious to keep it out of the papers till the time is nearer. By about five weeks I shall be in a position to say to them at Warwick Square that I will not be responsible for the paper till I feel better.

I cannot give you very good reports of my health. My old enemies have been busy with me and I have felt the onslaught, having no resisting power. I feel the difficulty of writing Claudiuses, but must just do the best I can. I dare say it would be better if I gave up everything, in the full sense of the word, but there are difficulties.

Now this for me is a long letter, and so you must be patient with it and expect another and write to me regularly. I like to keep my hand upon you. What a pity our scattering was.

Ever yours very affectionately,

W. Robertson Nicoll.

Nicoll's love of books never left him. Until almost the closing week of his life he lay reading in bed. On March 12 he began his last 'Claudius Clear'; it was on 'Sir William Harcourt,' but it had to be completed by Miss Stoddart's pen. On March 13 he dictated his final paragraph, which related to the jubilee of his old friend Dr. W. S. Bruce, of Banff. The same day he sent the following letter to Lord Riddell:

Bay Tree Lodge, Hampstead, *March* 13, 1923.

I have been very ill—too ill to see my friends. But I have thought a great deal about you, and always very affectionately. What a great lift and light you brought into my life!

I would not have bothered you with this, but you will remember you promised to give votes to Mr. J. M. Legge, of Wymans, for the Printers' Pension,

and he has been building a great deal upon this. Lord Marshall, to whom I wrote when I wrote to you, has also been very kind in the matter and tells me he has given Mr. Legge fifty votes.

As already stated, this pension was secured for Mr. Legge two or three weeks before Nicoll passed away.

The last letter which Nicoll was able to dictate he sent to Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams; it had reference to final arrangements in regard to the appointment of the Rev. J. M. E. Ross.

BAY TREE LODGE, HAMPSTEAD, *March* 24, 1923.

DEAREST ERNEST,—I was so thankful to get your letter. It took a weight off my spirit. I have suffered a great deal since I wrote to you before, but I am hoping now that I may be able to pull through.

Ever yours affectionately,

W. R. N.

On Easter Day, April 1, Nicoll's condition became critical. The news of his serious illness brought him many messages from old friends. For instance, on April 4 this telegram came:

'So sorry to hear you are not well. Sincerely trust this improving weather will bring you improved health. We need the inspiration and wise guidance of your powerful pen more than ever.

'D. LLOYD GEORGE.'

*From Sir J. M. Barrie.*

ADELPHI TERRACE HOUSE, STRAND, W.C. 2,
*April* 5, 1923.

MY DEAR NICOLL,—Often thinking of you, and a sudden desire to show you my hand of write again comes over me. I hope all is well with you—not as well, one knows, as once it was with you, nor with me either, nor with any of our old friends for that matter, but I trust as well as may be. One thing that certainly has not changed in me, nor I am sure in you, is our old affection. In my mind I have

many adventures with you still and embark once more on our lugger for U.S.A. Again I see us driven from place to place as your room became uninhabitable through the size of the Sunday editions in it, or we ran lest you be hauled before the magistrates for burning so many writing-tables with your cigarette-ends.

I have been writing practically nothing for a long time, leading a hermitish life on the whole—rather a reversion to my early days in London, when, however, as you knew, sometimes to your cost, I was better at pegging away. . . .

A longer screed than I had intended.

Always affectionately,

J. M. B.

Through April the sick man lingered on, 'waiting for God's leave to die.' The end came on May 4, when all the buds were breaking into flower. A few days earlier he had whispered to one of his nurses: 'I believe everything that I have written about immortality.'

EXPECTAT RESURRECTIONEM MORTUORUM ET VITAM VENTURI SAECULI.

# APPENDIX I

## AN EARLY SONNET[1]

REMEMBER me when I am far away,
And still enshrine me in your faithful heart.
Then 'twill not seem such bitterness to part,
For we shall meet in heaven another day.
But not as I am now, dying and weak;
The wafted winds that cool the starry shore
Bring healing to the dwellers evermore,
The rose of life is splendid on their cheek!
Remember me as I was long ago
What time we trode the woodland paths together;
When the trees clustered, and the sun was low,
And the proud hills were sweet with scented heather
And the hushed earth lay dreaming, and the skies
Smiled as of old on happy Paradise.

W. R. NICOLL.

## BORN BLIND[2]

'Whereas I was blind, now I see.'—JOHN ix. 25.

THAT summer morn you stood where thick
The clustering roses burned;
And though your face was sweet with peace,
From meek submission learned,
Through the closed curtains of your eyes
The soul looked out and yearned.

It was a weary journey, dear,
Of which you tired so soon—
You never saw the glad green earth
At peace in summer's noon,
Nor even knew how ocean moans
And foams beneath the moon.

[1] From an MS. book at Lumsden, not later than 1872.
[2] First printed in 'Songs of Rest,' 1879.

But if you never saw our joys,
You never saw our sin,
Our faces worn with tracks of tears—
And warring thoughts within,
Our eyes that strain with longing for
The peace they cannot win.

You saw your loved ones first in heaven,
With its deep peace in their eyes,
You saw the new Jerusalem
'Neath unpolluted skies,
And all things glad in God's clear light,
And love's sweet harmonies.

No night, no storm, come in these fair
Eternal years to mar
The glory near and clear you see,
To us so dimmed and far,
And Jesus as He is—your Sun,
Who is our morning Star.

W. R. NICOLL.

## HOME FROM THE HILL.[1]

'Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.'—R. L. S.

LET the weary body lie
Where he chose its grave,
'Neath the wide and starry sky,
By the Southern wave,
While the island holds her trust
And the hill keeps faith,
Through the watches that divide
The long night of death.

But the spirit free from thrall,
Now goes forth of these
To its birthright, and inherits
Other lands and seas :

[1] First published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, February 1895. Reprinted by kind permission of Messrs. Blackwood.

We shall find them when we seek him
In an older home,—
By the hills and streams of childhood
'Tis his weird to roam.

In the fields and woods we hear him
Laugh and sing and sigh ;
Or where by the Northern breakers
Sea-birds troop and cry ;
Or where over lonely moorlands
Winter winds fly fleet ;
Or by sunny graves he hearkens
Voices low and sweet.

We have lost him, we have found him :
Mother, he was fain
Nimbly to retrace his footsteps ;
Take his life again
To the breast that first had warmed it,
To the tried and true,—
He has come, our well belovèd,
Scotland, back to you !

W. R. Nicoll.

## THE TAKEN TO THE LEFT [1]

No ; it is not dying
Thus to fall asleep
As the work-day closes,
And the shadows deep
Tell of rest arriving,
Slumbers long and light,
With a still lamp burning
In the heart of night.

No ; it is not dying :
We are both with Him
Who is Lord of all the worlds,
Whether bright or dim.
If we sleep or if we wake
We will keep our tryst,
When the sign upon the sky
Brings the Day of Christ.

[1] Printed in 'Songs of Rest,' 1879.

No ; it is not dying :
Sure, unwearied arms
Are beneath me, saving
From the last alarms.
I am sinking thither,
Very full of rest,
As a bird with broken wings
Sinks into its nest.

W. R. Nicoll.

## 'IF HE SLEEP HE SHALL DO WELL'[1]

If he sleep he shall do well ;
We who wake are doing worse,
In the shadow of life's pain,
'Neath the burden of life's curse.

If he sleep he shall do well ;
We who wake are doing ill,
Wandering from the narrow way,
Weary of the road uphill.

If he sleep he shall do well ;
One day we shall also sleep,
Hands for long rest folded quiet,
Sealed eyes that shall never weep.

If he sleep he shall do well,
For he sleeps to wake again,
Past the doubting, past the dreaming,
Past the fearing, past the pain.

Well to sleep, but best to waken,
With the surcease from the strife ;
Then smooth-browed, bright-eyed, and rested,
Rise to wonder, love and life.

W. R. Nicoll.

[1] First published in the *British Weekly* of February 16, 1911.

# APPENDIX II

## ON THE 'STRICT AND PARTICULAR BAPTISTS'

THESE adjectives describe practice and doctrine. 'Strict' means that Communion is refused to Christians who have not been baptized by immersion. 'Particular' refers to the doctrine of Particular Redemption, which declares that Christ died for the elect.

In the earlier part of last century the Strict and Particular Baptists, who maintained high Calvinistic doctrines of Grace, had a number of notable ministers in England. Among these were, for example, William Gadsby, for over forty years pastor at Rochdale Road, Manchester; and John Kershaw, for forty-three years pastor of Hope Chapel, Rochdale. An Anglican clergyman, the Rev. J. C. Philpot, Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, resigned his fellowship and living in 1835, and in 1838 became a Strict Baptist pastor at Oakham and Stamford; in 1864 he removed to Croydon, where he died in 1869. The Rev. William Tiptaft,[1] vicar of Sutton Courtney, resigned his living and built a Baptist chapel at his own expense in 1831 at Abingdon, where he remained pastor till his death in 1864.

About 1859-60 the Strict Baptists became rent in twain by an acute theological controversy which concerned the mystery of the Eternal Generation of the Son by the Father. This cleavage has never been healed. It resulted in two distinct denominations, which still possess their rival monthly organs.

The *Gospel Standard* was founded in 1835 by William Gadsby, and published by his son John Gadsby, then a printer in Manchester. Its original title was 'The Gospel Standard, or feeble Christian's support.' William Gadsby's co-editor was John M'Kenzie, minister of the Strict Baptist chapel at Preston, and afterwards at Shaw Street, Liverpool. Before William Gadsby died in 1844, he had also been assisted by J. C. Philpot, who in 1849 became sole editor of the *Standard*

[1] Mr. Tiptaft at a funeral uttered this solemn sentence, which Nicoll would often quote: 'It is a great thing for a man to be well laid in his grave.'

for twenty years till his death in 1869. This magazine is now the joint property of the Gospel Standard Aid Society, founded in 1875 for the relief of sick and disabled ministers and widows of deceased ministers, and the Gospel Standard Poor Relief Society, founded in 1878, for the relief of poor members of the ' Gospel Standard ' churches. The present editor is J. K. Popham, pastor of Galeed Chapel, Brighton.

The *Earthen Vessel and Christian Record* was founded by Charles Waters Banks (1806-66), who for more than forty years was its sole editor, proprietor, and publisher. The first number appeared in December 1843, and the magazine was originally autobiographical, though it speedily assumed its present form. It survives to-day as the *Gospel Herald and Earthen Vessel.* Mr. Banks was a powerful personality who spent his strenuous life as a preacher, editor, and author. Nicoll considered him a great mystic as well.

Remarkable among the Strict Baptist ministers in London was James Wells, for forty-two years pastor of a large and influential congregation worshipping in the Borough Road Chapel and afterwards in the Surrey Tabernacle, Walworth. Mr. Wells belonged to the ' Earthen Vessel ' denomination. He was a man of saturnine disposition and most exclusive temper, yet he exercised astonishing authority over his people. They wept like children when he died in 1872, and his funeral was the greatest seen for a generation in South London. Like not a few Strict Baptists, Mr. Wells looked upon Mr. Spurgeon as dangerously loose in theology and even tainted to some extent with modern thought.

Both the *Standard* and the *Vessel* regularly printed memoirs of godly men and women who had been pillars of obscure chapels. These chapels—as was the custom among Strict Baptists—often bore weird Hebrew names, such as Salem, Jezreel, Rehoboth, Ænon, Jireh, or Galeed. But not a few of the memoirs were penetrated with deep and beautiful Christian experience. It was recorded, for instance, of one aged minister, settled for over fifty years in the same country town, that he preached up to the Sunday before his death, and on the succeeding Sunday another aged minister delivered his funeral sermon from the text, ' His hands were steady until the going down of the sun.'

Robert Browning in his ' Christmas Eve ' discerned the spiritual worth which lies hidden under the most forbidding peculiarities of Dissent. In the Strict and Particular Baptists Nicoll himself always felt a keen and friendly interest, recognizing their kinship with the ' marrow men ' of Scots theology. He

took delight in occasional attendance at their scattered places of worship. In 1916 he wrote: 'I have for many years learnt much from the writings of the Strict Baptists, and believe myself to be as well acquainted with them as most ministers among you.' And in 1921 he wrote to Mr. Reeve: 'I am sorry to see so many of the good old Calvinistic Baptist chapels vanishing away. The *Earthen Vessel* is no good to me now.'

# APPENDIX III

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